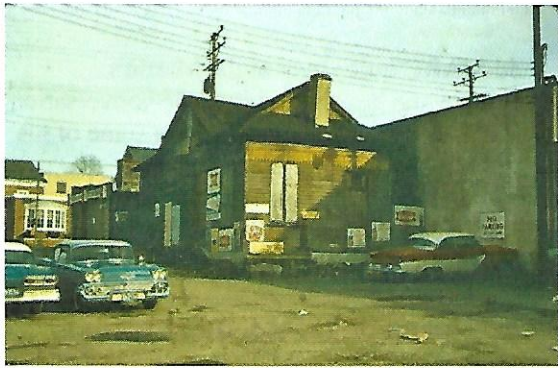


HISTORY: THE CATONSVILLE SHORTLINE R.R.

Part 1, by Martin K. (Ken) Van Horn, History Chairman

In January, 1963, I returned from my trip to ride the North Shore interurban just before it quit, with film left in my camera. So I braved the winter's cold to walk the length of the Catonsville Short-Line, from the far terminal at Catonsville to the junction within the Baltimore city limits. This took advantage of frost having killed off the vegetation that grew profusely between the ties in the summer. I rode out to Catonsville on the latest version of the "electric cars" which had killed the steam passenger trains in 1898. The following are recollections of observations made on that hike: The railroad ran from the junction with the Pennsylvania R.R. in a generally west-by-slightly-southwest direction for almost its entire length, then swept around a wide curve to enter Catonsville on a northwesterly alignment. In 1963 the tracks no longer ran up to the old passenger depot at Frederick Road, which was boarded-up and many years from its last repainting. Spur tracks still served the Wilson coal yard with a delivery trestle east of the main track, and the large warehouse to the west. The coal yard was empty of cars and appeared long-unused in 1963. There were three boxcars spotted at the warehouse: a freshly-painted



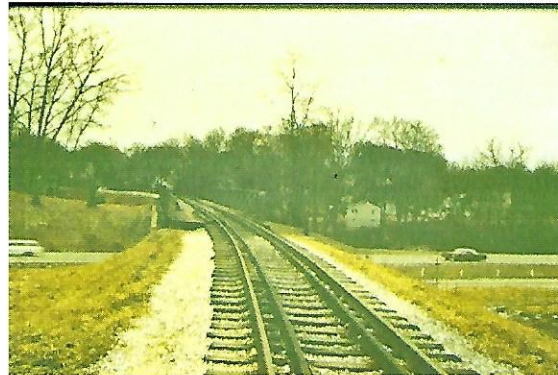
wooden, outside-braced car from the Green Bay & Western R.R., a Great Northern car and a rusty old Pennsylvania R.R. round-roof steel car with the number "1", apparently long retired from interchange service.



As the main line curved around from south-southeast to head northeast, it passed north of the Spring Grove State Hospital, with its own spur line that received coal for its heating and power plant. On this day in January, 1963, four Western Maryland twin hopper car loads of coal were set out on the coal delivery spur.



Most of the trackage was nearly totally obscured by weeds, but a mile or so from Catonsville, a section of new track with clean white ballast crossed a new deck girder bridge on concrete pedestals over I-695, the Baltimore Beltway. As the bridge was built as part of the Interstate Highway System construction, it was painted in the same light green as all bridges of the Interstate. Later in the era of Interstate construction, short line railroads were forced into abandonment to save this kind of cost. The Washington & Old Dominion for one.



INTERCHANGE

JUNE, 2016



Nearing the junction with the Pennsylvania R.R. mainline, the Catonsville Short-Line passed through the large Loudon Park Cemetery in a cut. The Loudon Park Cemetery streetcar line had before abandonment, paralleled the railroad to the north before swinging away to end at the Frederick Road gate.

At the mainline junction in southwest Baltimore, just south of Frederick Road and west of Caton Avenue, the Catonsville Short-Line came in from the southwest, emerging from a small wooded area. Here a northbound passenger train shot past as I emerged



from the woods walking the Catonsville line track. On the opposite side of the main tracks, the Claremont Branch left in a northeasterly direction to serve the Union Stock Yards, and was aligned in almost a perfectly straight line with the Catonsville line. In the unlikely event that the Pennsylvania R.R. would have allowed a crossing of their mainline at this point, use of the Claremont Branch would have brought the Catonsville line one mile closer to downtown Baltimore.

If one looked in the Official Guide, the Catonsville Short Line R.R. was not to be found. Under the Pennsylvania R.R., the listing was for the Catonsville Branch, but the line was always an independent short line that just happened to never have owned any rolling stock. It was leased to the P.R.R. and before that to P.R.R. subsidiaries Baltimore & Potomac and successor Philadelphia, Baltimore & Washington. The Catonsville Short Line was opened in 1884 for passenger and freight service. The "short line" referred to the fact that before it was built, Catonsville passenger had to go west to the B. & O. at Ellicott City to get east to Baltimore. The C.S.L. was not a direct shot to downtown. The trains continued on the mainline north and east through the B. & P. Tunnel and Union Station to terminate at the Northern Central's Calvert Station with most other P.R.R. system commuter and accommodation trains. The other means of reaching the city was the horsecars of the Baltimore, Catonsville & Ellicott Mills Street Railway. When the City & Suburban Ry. brought electric streetcars to this route, C.S.L. passenger service was doomed and ended in 1898. There were periodical proposals to resume passenger service but none came to fruition. The C.S.L. became home to plodding B class 0-6-0's hauling freight from the yard at Gwynn down the mainline to Loudon Junction and then via C.S.L. rails to Catonsville. In 1945, the C.S.L. was reorganized as the Caton & Loudon Railroad.

In 1970, the C&L transported 160 cars of freight including 118 hopper cars of coal that went to Spring Grove. The total revenue was \$1,983. The last load of coal was delivered to Spring Grove on December 30, 1970. After that date trips to Catonsville from Gwynn Yard became very sporadic and sometimes consisted of only a single car. With the shut down of D.C.A. Foods' Catonsville operations, only twenty-four cars of chemicals were transported over the railroad throughout 1971.

Conditions of track had been consistently deteriorating during this time as declining revenues had forced the C&L to stop paying the Penn Central for maintenance as of March, 1968. Weeds began to take over to such an extent that it created a difficult situation for the train crew. During the summer, the engineer often struggled to keep the train moving up grade as the plants that grew over the rails caused the wheels to slip and spin as the train crept along. A pumice type of light stone, dumped between the rails, was how a railroad would lay ballast when trying to minimize costs. That attempt to stabilize the roadbed may have been the last effort on the part of the Penn Central and Caton & Loudon to maintain the physical plant. (To be continued next issue.)

INTERCHANGE

JULY, 2016

HISTORY: THE CATONSVILLE SHORTLINE R.R.

Part 2, by Martin K. (Ken) Van Horn, History Chairman

We left off last month telling of the deterioration of the Caton & Loudon R.R. and the downward spiral of the freight business. It should be noted here that the Penn Central was going through its own financial troubles system-wide at this time, and had embarked on a period of deferred maintenance that would not reverse itself until the Federal Government stepped in to create Conrail in 1976.

Another point of interest relates to the switch at St. Agnes where the line Catonsville diverged off of the Penn Central main line. Penn Central was looking for an excuse to close down the C&L to eliminate the switch. One must understand that this was a facing point switch; which is to say a train would enter the branch off the main line while traveling in the direction of normal traffic for that track. In 1971, there were four tracks from the B&P tunnels all the way to the Patapsco River. The track with the C&L was furthest to the west, handling south-bound traffic. Trains through that area would reach 60 miles-per-hour for freights and over 100 miles-per-hour for passenger trains. Penn Central's concern would have been based on the possibility that vandals could have broken the locks and realigned the points thus directing a south-bound train onto the branch line. That would have been a disaster for a passenger trains and had a major potential for loss of life and damage.

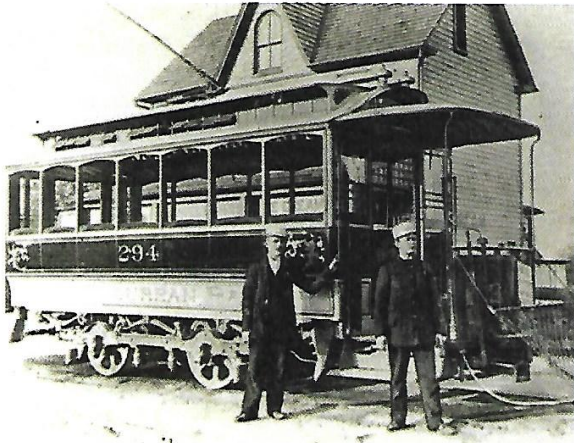
There are conflicting accounts as to when service actually ended on the line. According to one report, the last run was September 19, 1973. The reference used came from Penn Central Record File 81 which is believed to no longer exist. In opposition to this, local resident George Miller kept a log of activity from September, 1968 to July 24, 1971, in which he noted the day and time each train ran. Miller's log is not all inclusive as there were days the train ran that he was not home or missed an entry, but his record keeping clearly shows a pattern of dwindling trips up to his last entry of July 24, 1971, over two years earlier; however, it, too, is believed to be inaccurate.

Other accounts relating to the last movement over the C&L can be found in the *Catonsville Times* and the *Baltimore Sun*. They both place the last trip in April, 1972. Although the exact date is not known, the month is probably correct. The *Sun* states that six cars were responsible for \$24 in revenue the first three months of 1972. Hurricane Agnes ravaged the Middle-Atlantic in 1972 and left a number of trees down across the C&L track. In August, 1972, the petition to abandon was filed. The official end came on July 28, 1973 when the Interstate Commerce Commission granted Penn Central's petition to abandon the line. : Mr. Jack Chertkof of the Franklin Realty Co. was listed as President of the Caton & Loudon Railway by the State Department of Assessments and Taxation for January 1, 1971. Instead of a 1972 Annual Report, Mr. Chertkof submitted a letter dated February 22, 1972 stating that he and all other officers resigned in November 1970, effective December 31, 1970, the day after the final coal delivery to Spring Grove. It was apparent that, with the loss of this, the largest customer on the line, the end was at hand.

As noted above, for the First Quarter of 1972, 6 cars moved over the line for a total revenue of \$24. In April, 1972, the last car of freight was brought to the last customer on the line, the Johnson Chemical Company at Mellor Avenue. Mr. Robert Johnson, head of the company that had been located along the tracks for 27 years was notified by letter from Mr. Jack Chertkof of Franklin Realty Co. that freight service would be discontinued on July 1, 1972. Mr. Johnson was disappointed that he no longer would have the service of the rail line, but he also noted that lack of track maintenance "required two weeks to move a boxcar from Caton Avenue to Macgruder Avenue, with four men with sickles preceding the train along the weed-filled tracks". In 1972, the Penn Central Transportation Co. was bankrupt, and as part of its program to get rid of thousands of miles of little-used and unprofitable track, asked the Philadelphia federal court supervising the bankruptcy for permission to petition the Interstate Commerce Commission for authority to formally abandon freight service on the Caton & Loudon. This permission was granted and the petition was filed with the I.C.C. the second week of August, 1972. On June 13, 1973, service to Catonsville was abandoned by the Penn Central.

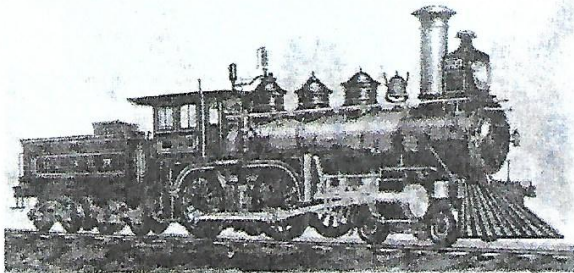
INTERCHANGE

JULY, 2016



City & Suburban Ry 294, running between Towson and Catonsville, one of the type that killed off Catonsville Short Line passenger service. Here in 1894 at York Rd and Arlington Ave, the 294 is crewed by John Calgan, Motorman & Charles E. Sentsz, Conductor.

"If you can't lick them, join them!" Here is the Short Line's Catonsville Station 1894 with a sign proclaiming that it houses the agency for Gaither's Express operating box freight motors on the City & Suburban Railway.



Baltimore & Potomac R.R. No. 303 is typical of the 19th. Century power that would have operated on the Catonsville Short Line R.R. C. B. Chaney drawing. Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania.



Rare photo of a train approaching Paradise Station in the days of passenger service. This is the only photo to surface so far showing a passenger train on the Catonsville Short Line.



PRR 34 class B-8 0-6-0 Switcher, typical steamer of the CSLRR in the early 20th Century, supplanted by B-6sb.

Photo content will continue in the next issue.

INTERCHANGE

SEPTEMBER, 2016

HISTORY: THE CATONSVILLE SHORTLINE R.R.

Part 3, by Martin K. (Ken) Van Horn, History Chairman



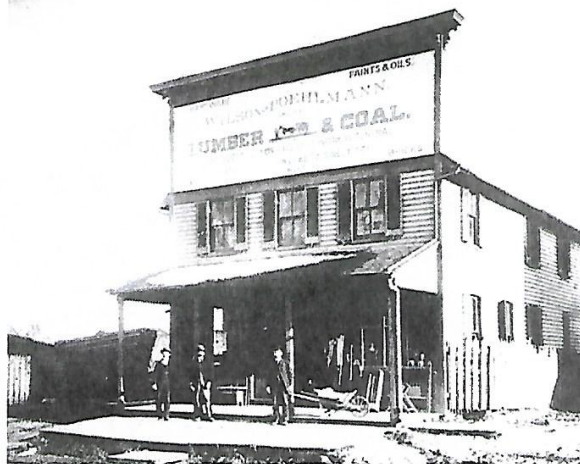
The route of the Catonsville Short Line, labeled P.R.R. Catonsville Branch, on the 1899 U.S.Coast & Geodetic Survey topographical Map



Frederick Road in 1885. The Wilson & Poehlmann Lumber & Coal Co. at left was the Short Line's largest customer. Next to the right is the Library Hall where meetings were held leading to the building of the railroad, and finally at left is the railroad's depot. Another view of Wilson & Poehlmann is below, right.



By 1940, the yard was John S. Wilson Lumber & Coal. This view at left shows the rear behind the storefront on Frederick Rd. The railroad spur came in here.

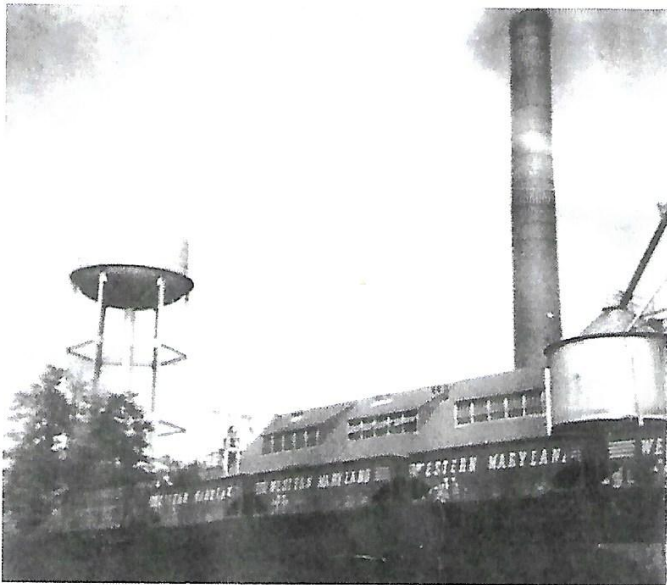


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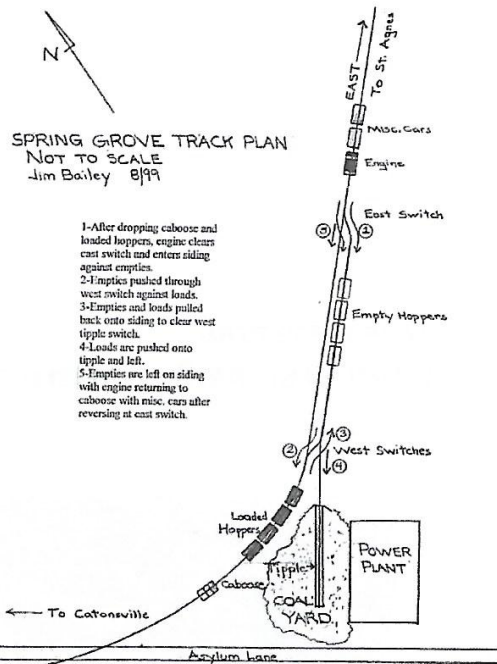
SEPTEMBER, 2016

CATONSVILLE BRANCH.—Trains leave Baltimore (Union Station) for Catonsville (8 miles) 7 10, 7 55, *9 07, 10 10, 11 55 a.m., 12 14, *3 18, 4 27, 4 57, *6 32, *9 28, 11 33 p.m., 12 30 p.m. Returning, leave Catonsville 16 55, 17 48, 18 29, 19 46, 10 30 a.m., 11 23, 12 59, 14 08, 15 04, 16 07, *7 10, *10 10 p.m., 11 12 a.m., 12 00, 05 30 p.m., arriving at Baltimore 7 20, 8 13, 8 54, 10 12, 10 55 a.m., 1 48, 3 15, 4 33, 5 31, 6 32, 7 38, 10 35 p.m., 12 37 a.m., 12 25, 12 55 p.m.

The timetable for the Catonsville Short Line in June, 1893, a year before the competition from electric trolleys.



The delivery of coal to the Spring Grove Power Plant in 1968. Collection of James H. Bailey.



The track plan and switching operation at Spring Grove by Catonsville resident, James H. Bailey, explains why the train was very mixed in 1968 when it crossed the Beltway bridge into Catonsville, below.



And the Cabin Car rolling off towards Catonsville ends this, our look at the Catonsville Short Line Railroad.