



Engine and crew of the White Deer and Loganton Railway (1907).

Photo Courtesy of Ivan J. Bingaman, Montoursville, Pa.



Engine and excursion car of White Deer and Loganton Railway (1908).

Photo Courtesy of Mrs. Clarence Walker, Winfield, Pa.

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NARROW-GAUGE RAILROADING IN UNION COUNTY

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THE history of Pennsylvania has been greatly influenced by railroads, large and small. Nearly everyone recognizes the importance of the major trunk-line systems, but there is a great deal of history, too, in the little railroads, the short lines, and, most colorful of all, the narrow-gauge railroads.

Narrow-gauge railroads today are fast vanishing. There is only one narrow-gauge common carrier still operating in Pennsylvania, and only a handful are left in other states throughout the nation. Yet years ago, when these little lines were in their prime, Pennsylvania had almost the "lion's share" of narrow-gauge lines within its borders. Tiny locomotives, pulling diminutive trains, chugged up and down now forgotten railroad lines such as the Eagles Mere, the Mt. Gretna Narrow Gauge, the Newport and Shermans Valley, the Peach Bottom, the Tionesta Valley, and a host of other rural lines.

The two little railroads that served Union County were typical examples of the old-fashioned narrow-gauge. Although they were small and their careers were relatively short, they formed a part of the transportation network in that area.

The shortest of the two and the first to commence operations was the New Berlin and Winfield Railroad. The village of New Berlin at the turn of the century was a busy rural community but without any railroad connections with the outside world. The Pennsylvania Railroad at Mifflinburg and the Reading Railroad at Winfield could only be reached by wagon and team over un-

improved roads. The realization that the Union Seminary soon would be established in New Berlin brought the villagers face to face with the problem of how to improve their local transportation facilities. With a limited amount of capital available, a narrow-gauge railroad seemed to be the answer to the problem.

A group of interested businessmen in the area conceived the idea of a railroad from New Berlin to Winfield, to connect with the Reading. The section between the two towns was comparatively level, so little grading would be necessary. So on September 13, 1904, a group of men—including I. C. Burd, of the firm of Burd and Rogers of Shamokin; his brother S. F. Burd, a New Berlin merchant; and Irwin J. Moyer—applied for a charter in the name of the New Berlin and Winfield Railroad. The new company was capitalized at \$25,000.

Local enthusiasm ran high. The village of New Berlin put \$4,000 towards the project. Work was soon started on the new narrow-gauge. By the end of November grading had been completed from New Berlin to a place called Dry Valley Cross Roads. The construction gang numbered over seventy men, including students from the seminary at New Berlin. A severe winter, however, put an end to construction work for the time being and it was not until the spring of 1905 that work was again pushed forward.

Saturday, June 10, 1905, was a big day in Winfield. The first locomotive of the N. B. & W. was unloaded from a flat car on the Reading Railroad and was placed on the newly-laid narrow-gauge rails. It was really quite an engine, built by the Brooks Locomotive Works at Dunkirk, N. Y. The engine was of the American type, or eight-wheel design, and weighed six tons. It could pull a load of forty tons. Being the first, it of course carried the number "one." It pulled the first passenger train into New Berlin on June 14, 1905.

Such a thing as a new railroad could not go without a "grand opening," and no better occasion could be found than the Fourth of July, 1905. A real celebration was put on in New Berlin that day. The festivities were opened by a parade; then there followed a reception for the railroad officials. Various addresses were given on the campus of the seminary. The balance of the morning was given over to tub and canoe races; at noon came the usual banquet,

which was the part of all railroad celebrations most anticipated by the visiting guests. The afternoon was spent in various games and sports including wheelbarrow and bag races, a "greased pig" contest and a baseball game between New Berlin and Selinsgrove. Four bands were kept busy providing music for the occasion. Needless to say, the railroad was pronounced a definite success after such a gala opening.

The distance from New Berlin to Winfield was eight miles. The three-foot-gauge track was laid on a right of way sixteen-and-one-half feet in width. The railroad from New Berlin to Dry Valley ran directly through the farm land, and it was said that what the farmers received for damages hardly covered the costs of repairing the fences. From Dry Valley Cross Roads to Winfield, the railroad followed the Dry Valley Run. This section was somewhat more expensive to build as some grading was necessary.

The facilities at New Berlin consisted of a ticket office, an express room, a waiting room and a large grain and freight building. There was also a building where the engine and cars were stored and serviced when repairs were required. The narrow-gauge did not have a station of its own at Winfield but used that of the Reading Railroad. There was a "transfer track," about a quarter of a mile in length at Winfield, where the freight would be moved from the standard-gauge cars to the narrow-gauge cars, or vice versa. There were several stops between Winfield and New Berlin but these were little more than farm lanes.

As time went on, additional engines were acquired. Engine "number two" was an American type, built by the Dickinson Locomotive Works, while engine "number three," of the same type, came from the Baldwin Locomotive Works at Philadelphia. "Engine two" at first carried the old fashioned link-and-pin couplings but was later equipped with those of a more modern design. Of the three, engine "number one" saw the most service on the railroad.

The railroad had two passenger cars and an open "excursion car" to handle the passenger trade. The cars were built in Wilmington, Delaware, and were painted red with yellow lettering and trim. When the line was in its prime, there were four round trips on weekdays and two on Sundays, connecting with

the various Reading trains that stopped at Winfield. The running time was thirty minutes for the eight miles, but one old engineer admitted, "we could do it in eighteen, if we had to." Train service on the narrow-gauges was usually informal, and the N. B. & W. was no exception.

Most of the trains were mixed, freight and passenger. Once a passenger, en route to Winfield, found he had left his suitcase on the station platform at New Berlin. He promptly advised the conductor of his plight, and the conductor had the train return to New Berlin to get the missing suitcase. Such was the service given on the narrow-gauge. There were no sidings, no signals, nor other communication between terminals. Engines ran forward in one direction and backed on the return trip because the line did not have a turntable! The possibility of collisions was reduced to a minimum as only one train at a time was allowed on the railroad. Thus no complicated signal system was necessary.

Lumbering in the area provided much business for the railroad. Many mine props and cross ties were hauled out over the railroad; some fifty thousand ties were loaded at New Berlin during one winter. The railroad fertilized the fields for the neighboring farmers. During the spring, an engine would push a carload of fertilizer over the line and the crew would unload the material at whatever point a farmer would order.

Before the coming of automobiles, there was quite a bit of local passenger travel on the line. Special trains would be operated to such occasions as festivals or church affairs at New Berlin or Winfield. During the summer of 1914, a group of people in New Berlin formed a "Japanese Lantern Club," which accompanied the New Berlin band to church socials. One evening, the group chartered the narrow-gauge train to go to Winfield to attend a church supper. After the supper was over, the group walked back to New Berlin, using the Japanese lanterns to light their way down the road. Although the railroad issued a regular timetable with designated stops, trains would stop wherever a passenger would be waiting. If a farmer wished to go into town, all he had to do was to stand along the track and wave to the engineer to stop the train.

While the narrow-gauge at New Berlin was prospering, another narrow-gauge came into use, farther north in Union County. This

was the White Deer and Loganton Railway at White Deer, Pennsylvania. Although the railroad operated both freight and passenger service, it was controlled by a lumber company, so a great part of its operations was concerned with the hauling of lumber from the nearby mountains.

The story of the narrow-gauge at White Deer goes back before the turn of the century. The Duncan Lumber Company in the nineties was cutting lumber in the vicinity of Paddy's Mountain in Mifflin County. The company operated a narrow-gauge railway, using wooden tracks, to haul the lumber out to the Pennsylvania Railroad at Paddy's Mountain station.

When the supply of timber on this tract gradually declined, however, the Duncan Lumber Company, in March of 1899, transferred operations to White Deer village, across the Susquehanna River from Watsonstown. A narrow-gauge railroad was constructed by the John F. Duncan Lumber Co. along the White Deer Creek solely to facilitate the removal of timber from the nearby mountains. It was operated just as a logging railroad under private management.

After the untimely death of Mr. Duncan, however, the lumber operations were sold out to the Whitmer-Steele lumber interests at Sunbury, Pennsylvania. Then the narrow-gauge lumber railroad at White Deer was incorporated as the "White Deer and Loganton Railway," on April 17, 1906. The Duncan interests had operated the road, which had been known as the White Deer Valley Railroad, from White Deer into Duncan, some fifteen miles. The new owners, during 1906 and 1907, extended the trackage from Duncan to Loganton, Pennsylvania, twenty-four miles from White Deer. The first narrow-gauge train ran from White Deer to Loganton on May 1, 1907. The new operators of the road included Charles Steele, president; Harry Steele, vice-president; and Elmer Crissman as superintendent.

The new railroad meant much to the people of Loganton and the area known as Sugar Valley. Prior to the coming of the railroad, all supplies and merchandise had to be brought in over the mountains by wagons from Lock Haven. The narrow-gauge gave Loganton an outlet on the Williamsport-Shamokin line of the Reading Railroad at White Deer. Thus these small railroads played a great part in the development of the wilder, more re-

mote sections of the state, before the coming of the automobile and fine highways of the present day.

The Loganton narrow-gauge commenced right beside the Reading station at White Deer. The three-foot-gauge tracks ran north along the Reading for about one half mile to a point known as White Deer Junction, before turning westward and heading into the forests. The Reading agent at White Deer did all of the station business for the W. D. & L., including the freight billing and the ticket work. Of course, at White Deer, all shipments had to be unloaded from the narrow-gauge cars and reloaded onto the Reading Railroad cars. The narrow-gauge maintained a large building at White Deer Junction, where the locomotives could be stored when not in use, or where repairs could be made.

The section through which the little railroad operated was a very scenic wooded area. The roadbed followed the White Deer Creek, which was well known in Central Pennsylvania for its "speckled" or brook trout. The timetable of the line showed such stations as Clam Bake Springs, Lick Run, Mile Run, Zimmerman (or Duncan), Tea Springs, Green's Gap and Carroll. Yet these were only small "flag" stops, with little more than a waiting place for the train. At the town of Loganton, the railroad maintained its own station and an agent who handled the tickets, freight billing and express business. There were also branches built from the "main line" at Mile Run, Zimmerman's and Green's Gap. These lines were used by the White Deer Lumber Company in moving timber from the Nittany Mountains in that area.

When the railroad was first opened, there were two passenger trains a day into Loganton. After about two years, however, this schedule was changed to one train a day for passengers. It took two hours and twenty minutes for the train to creep over the twenty-four miles of thirty-pound narrow-gauge rails. Trains usually stopped at the station of Tea Springs to take water. Although there was only one passenger schedule operated, there were two log trains operated on an irregular schedule by the White Deer Lumber Company. A heavy tonnage of white and yellow pine lumber was taken out of that area yearly. The White Deer and Loganton and the White Deer Lumber Company were controlled by the same interests. Therefore the line was built much on the style of a lumber railroad, with light rails and not too much heavy grading.

Four rather unique locomotives were used on the line, although only two actually carried the lettering, "White Deer and Loganton Railway." These two engines were numbered "one" and "two" and were of the Climax, or geared type. This type of locomotive was built by the old Climax Manufacturing Company of Corry, and was the outcome of a demand for an engine with great traction power and flexibility, for use on light, cheaply constructed track. They could burn either wood or coal for fuel, were equipped with large stacks, and carried the large, square, oil-burning headlights. Now, engines "three" and "four" were owned by the White Deer Lumber Company. The "three" was similar to "one" and "two," but "engine four" was really an oddity.

"Engine four" was known as the "boxcar" locomotive. Technically, it was known as a verticle-boilered Climax, built by the company at Corry. The frame of the engine was just like a box car with the boiler in a verticle position, with the pistons and other parts of the engine several feet to the left. The coal box was at one end of the locomotive while the water tank was at the other end. These locomotives were rather light but, nevertheless, they were powerful on the steep grades that were often found on lumber railroads. Engines of the type could be even operated on wooden rails or log "pole" roads if necessary. The four engines were interchanged between the logging railroad of the White Deer Lumber Company and the line of the W. D. & L., although the box-car engine was maintained primarily for negotiating the steep grades and the sharp curves on the various lumber operations. It had originally been brought from the Duncan lumber company over at Paddy's Mountain.

Nevertheless, the White Deer and Loganton had its share of passenger business. The company had four passenger cars. One was a regular type passenger coach while the other was a combination, passenger and baggage. They were built by an eastern manufacturer. These cars had narrow treads on the wheels and low flanges and thus gave quite a bit of trouble, making it difficult to keep the cars on the tracks. Then the company carpenters were put to work and they turned out a home-made coach, a milk-express car, and an open excursion car for summer use. These had wheels with wide treads and high flanges similar to wheels on log cars and were more satisfactory. Excursions and specials

were operated to Tea Springs, a pretty picnic spot in the woods, where there was a pavilion and facilities for outings, dances and picnic gatherings. The village of Loganton and the various lumber camps also were sources of passenger revenue. Then, too, the American Express Company transacted business over the narrow-gauge.

The period of operation of the narrow gauges in Union County was rather brief. In June of 1912, the narrow-gauge at New Berlin suffered heavily when the Dry Valley Run overflowed its banks in a flash flood. The line had to be closed for weeks until the washed-out right-of-way could be rebuilt. From that time on, revenues declined and expenses were on the increase. In order to reduce the costs of train operation, Irvin Moyer, general manager of the New Berlin and Winfield, installed probably what was the first motor-driven passenger train. He converted a Mitchell automobile for train operation. It was equipped with the usual type flanged railroad wheels, sander and air brakes. The wheels were protected by safety bars, so if the car should leave the rails it would just slide along the tracks and not turn over. The bright red car used to "speed" between New Berlin and Winfield in fifteen minutes. This car provided service on many of the trips when there was not enough business to justify firing up a steam locomotive.

The year 1916 marked the end of the narrow-gauge era in Union County. The highways were becoming improved, automobiles were appearing, and the lumber supply was diminishing. Finally, after several years of losses, the last narrow-gauge train pulled out of Winfield for New Berlin on September 16, 1916. A few months before, on June 30, 1916, the last train had operated over the White Deer and Loganton. The narrow-gauge at New Berlin was dismantled and sold for scrap. Yet the White Deer and Loganton was destined to run again, when the parent company shipped the engines, cars, rails, and other equipment to another lumbering operation at Cornwall, Virginia.

The narrow-gauge railways lasted only about eleven years in Union County, but while they ran the management and employees did their best to fill the transportation needs of the territory they served. The smallness of the narrow-gauge did not limit its contributions to the development of Union County.

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