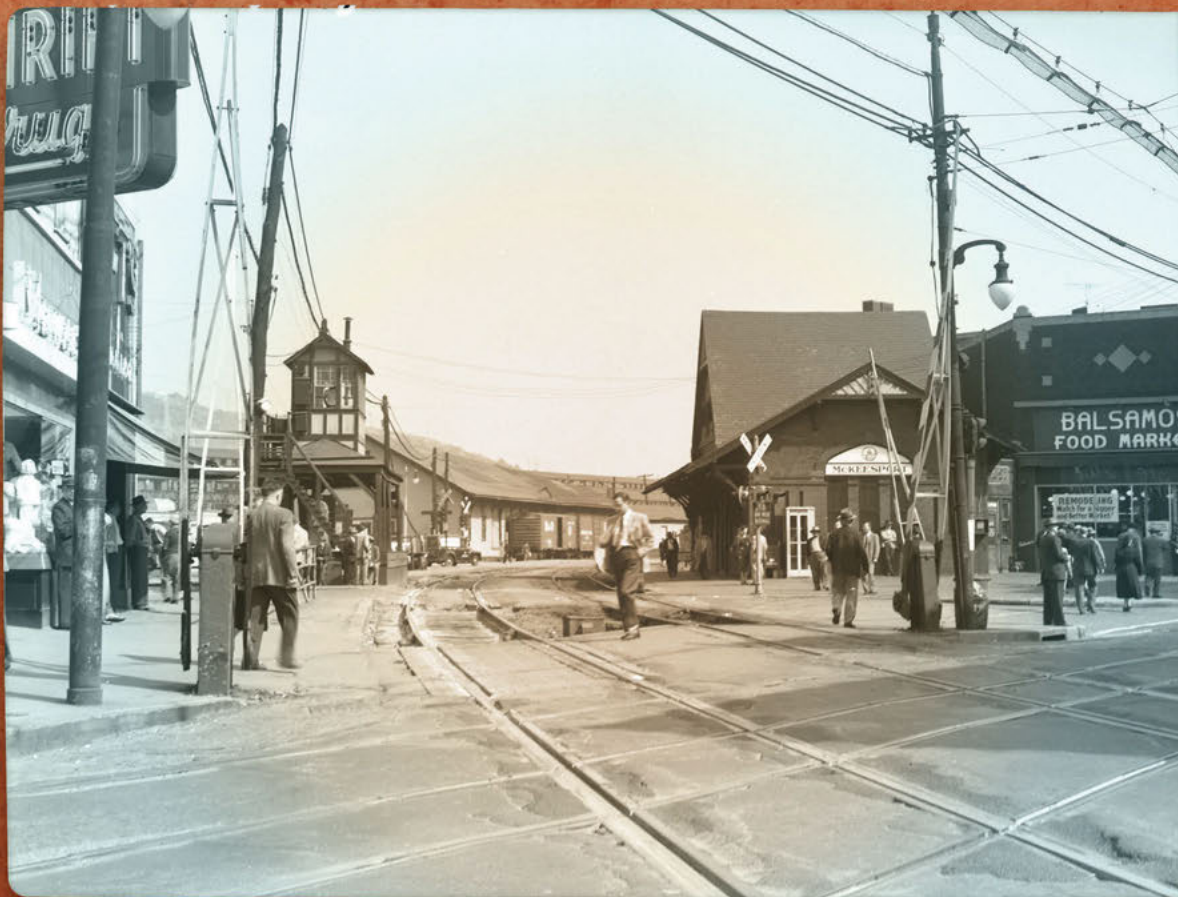


RAIL PASSENGER SERVICE IN WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

PATrain at B&O Station, 1989.

44 WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY | WINTER 2014-15



McKeesport B&O Station, 1940s.
Barriger Collection, University of Missouri via Ken Kobus.

My dad, David Roth, practiced law at the Frick Building in Downtown Pittsburgh and commuted daily on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad from McKeesport for 13 years from 1939 until 1952, when we moved back to Pittsburgh. Often, when he had Saturday morning office hours in the early 1940s, he'd take me on the train with him. These trips fascinated me. At the McKeesport station, the train en route from its terminal at Versailles passed a few feet from the waiting passengers and I can still recall the aromas associated with trains of this era, especially the acrid smoke from the locomotive and the steam used to heat the passenger cars in cold weather.

I vividly remember some of the passing scenery as the train made its way along the Monongahela River, stopping at the stations that lined its way: Riverton, Braddock, Glenwood, and Hazelwood. But what really persists are the memories of the sights en route that no longer exist: steel mills, breweries, and the busy rail yards. This personal exposure led to a lifelong fascination with railroads, trains, technology, and maps.



ABOVE: Penn Station,
1930s.

Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.

BELOW: PRR 28th Street
engine yard, c. 1950.

Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.

PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD



Nearly all the trains in today's Pittsburgh region carry freight and pass through the city without stopping.

Only four passenger trains stop or originate in the Steel City, but it was not always so. Western Pennsylvania was once served by many railroads: the Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR), now Norfolk Southern, the Baltimore & Ohio (B&O), the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie (both now CSX) and the Pittsburgh & West Virginia. These were supplemented by smaller freight lines such as the Union, Montour, Monongahela, and Bessemer & Lake Erie. As late as 1964, almost 100 passenger trains originated, terminated, or called at various local stations and terminals each day. In 1924, that number was reported to be over 400!¹

Besides carrying people, some passenger trains had other tasks such as transporting newspapers, express parcels, and passenger baggage. This was implemented by adding one or more cars to the long-distance trains or a so-called "combination" car to the local trains, which had half passenger seating and half express parcel space. Often, the express service and cars were a function of an independent entity called the Railway Express Agency.

According to Samuel Mahfood of Squirrel Hill, who managed the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette's* delivery trucks for many years, bundles of newspapers would be delivered to downtown railroad stations by 10 p.m. so that they could be loaded onto overnight trains destined for Chicago, New York, Washington and other distant locations in time for morning distribution. Similarly, evening papers such as the *Pittsburgh Press* and *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph* were carried by daylight trains for evening distribution.

Both local freight trains and passenger trains have all but disappeared. Most of today's freight trains are "run-throughs," passing uninterrupted on their way to-and-from regional or distant yards, power plants, ports, mines, and terminals. Recently, this traffic

Table 8

Eastern Standard Time

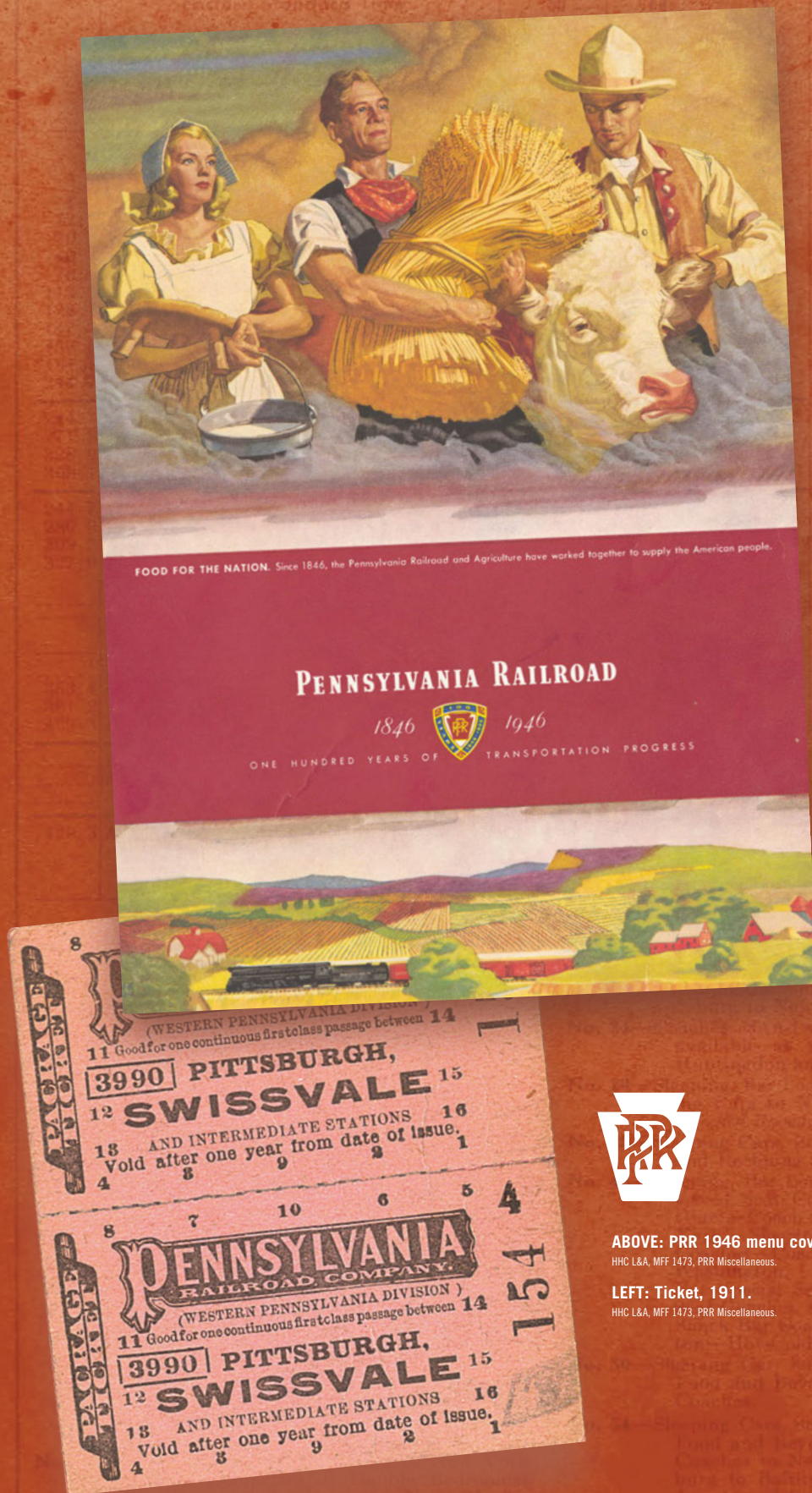
has been enhanced by trains carrying North Dakota oil and locally produced liquid natural gas. Sidings for industrial and commercial freight cars have also disappeared.

A remnant of a once-flourishing passenger service is provided by Amtrak: a pair of daily trains between Pittsburgh and New York—one in each direction—and a pair of overnight trains between Chicago and Washington, D.C., which stop at Penn Station in downtown Pittsburgh in late evening/early morning hours. There has been no rail commuter service since 1989.

Local passenger trains were able to compete with other public transportation such as streetcars and buses because each served its own niche. For instance, between McKeesport and downtown Pittsburgh, the options were commuter rail (B&O, P&LE) and Pittsburgh Railways streetcars (Routes 68 and 56). The trains took approximately 30 minutes each on a direct route along the Monongahela River, with five or six scheduled stops. The streetcars, on a less direct route with many unscheduled stops, required nearly an hour to make the trip. Streetcars and buses, naturally, were impeded by street traffic and congestion, while the trains were on an independent right-of-way.

While attending Pitt, I frequently boarded the “68” in downtown McKeesport. Travel time to Oakland could consume anywhere from 30 minutes to a full hour. However, streetcars and buses served more communities and neighborhoods and were less expensive to use. Streetcars required only one motorman/conductor, while trains had large crews, work rules, and maintenance requirements.

It would be interesting to compare the advantages of yesterday’s commuter trains with modern local developments such as the restricted Busway, which primarily uses the right-of-way formerly employed by the Pennsylvania Railroad’s eastbound commuter trains. Some major metropolitan areas have retained their local rail service under civic or state control, including New



ABOVE: PRR 1946 menu cover.
HHC L&A, MFF 1473, PRR Miscellaneous.

LEFT: Ticket, 1911.
HHC L&A, MFF 1473, PRR Miscellaneous.



PITTSBURGH AND WEST VIRGINIA RAILROAD

Wabash Station, c. 1905.

LoC 4a12732.

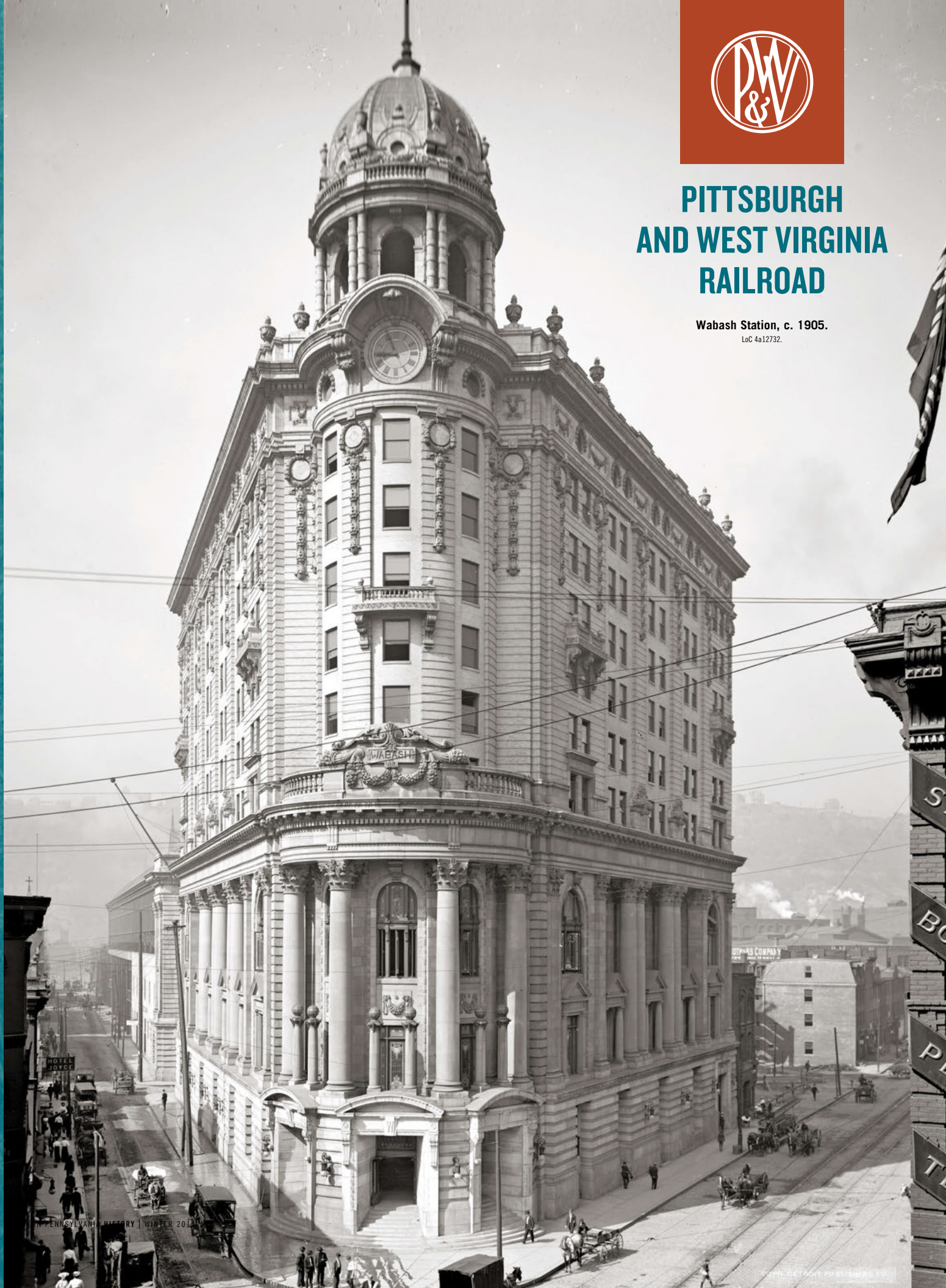


Table 8

Eastern Standard Time

The Wabash Terminal, located at the intersection of Liberty Avenue and Stanwix Street, comprised an ornate office building coupled with a train shed towering two-stories above street level. Passenger service ended in 1931 and the building was demolished in 1954.

York, Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago and Los Angeles. Amtrak trains mostly use the tracks of privately owned freight railroads, and are thus affected by conflicts in scheduling and slowdowns.

MAJOR PASSENGER STATIONS

In the old days, the four major Pittsburgh passenger railroads each had a downtown station.

The Pennsylvania Railroad scheduled the most trains, which all emanated from or passed through downtown's Penn Station, which was

so busy that it required a large adjoining yard to service its many locomotives. The B&O Station at Smithfield Street mainly served as a base for commuter trains, but for a time it also originated and terminated passenger service to West Virginia, Ohio, and western New York.

The P&LE Station (currently the Grand Concourse restaurant in Station Square) provided a depot for long-distance B&O trains running over its track from Chicago or Detroit to cities on the Eastern seaboard. It also served as a terminus for its own commuter trains and a limited number of regional trains between Pittsburgh and Cleveland, some which

connected with the main line trains of the New York Central System.

The Pittsburgh and West Virginia Station (P&WV) served the least number of trains and had the shortest existence, but possessed the most elaborate terminal building of all. That was the Wabash Terminal, located at the intersection of Liberty Avenue and Stanwix Street, comprised of an ornate office building coupled with a train shed towering two-stories above street level.² Passenger service ended in 1931 and the terminal caught on fire twice in 1946, but it was not until 1954 that the building was demolished.³

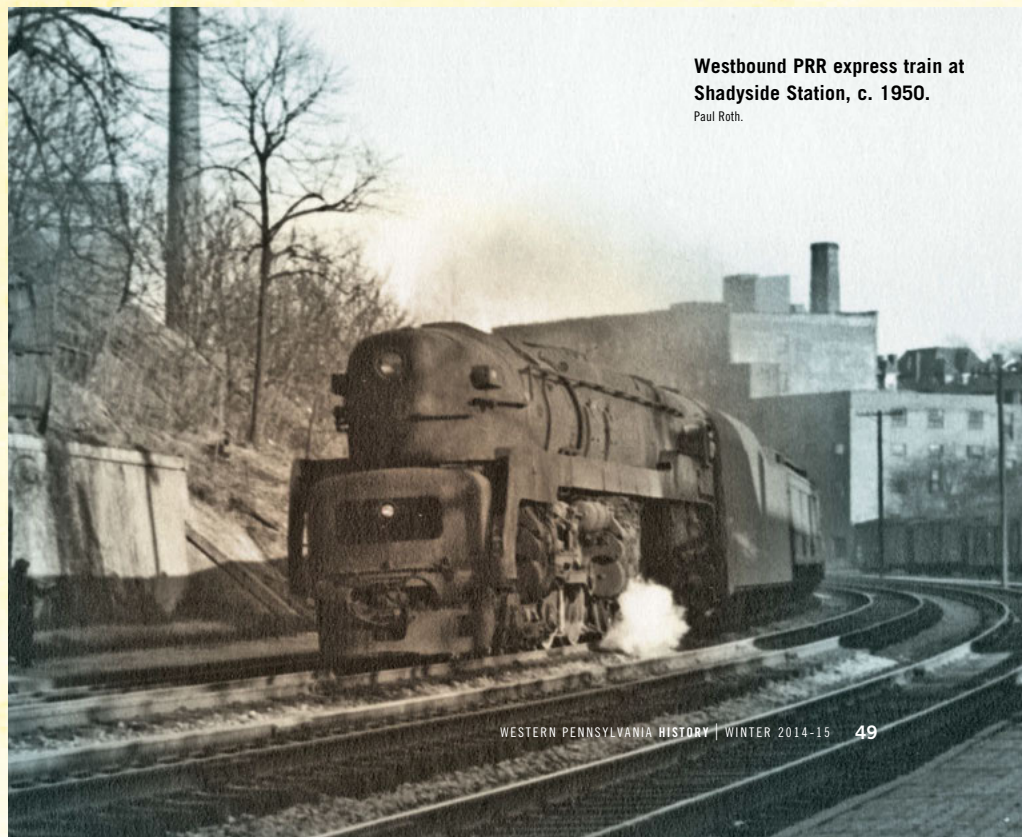
PRR

Through the 1950s, PRR's Pittsburgh commuter service was extensive. From Penn Station, its routes extended to Oakmont and Freeport, northbound along the east and west banks of the Allegheny River, respectively. To the south it served communities along the west bank of the Monongahela as far as Elrama, near Monongahela. In a westerly direction, individual routes terminated at Steubenville, Ohio, and Beaver Falls. The most extensive



B&O Versailles-Pittsburgh local at Riverton, c. 1945.

Paul Roth.



Westbound PRR express train at Shadyside Station, c. 1950.

Paul Roth.

Smithfield Street Station, 1890s.
Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.



BALTIMORE AND OHIO RAILROAD

Smithfield Street Station, c. 1950.
Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.

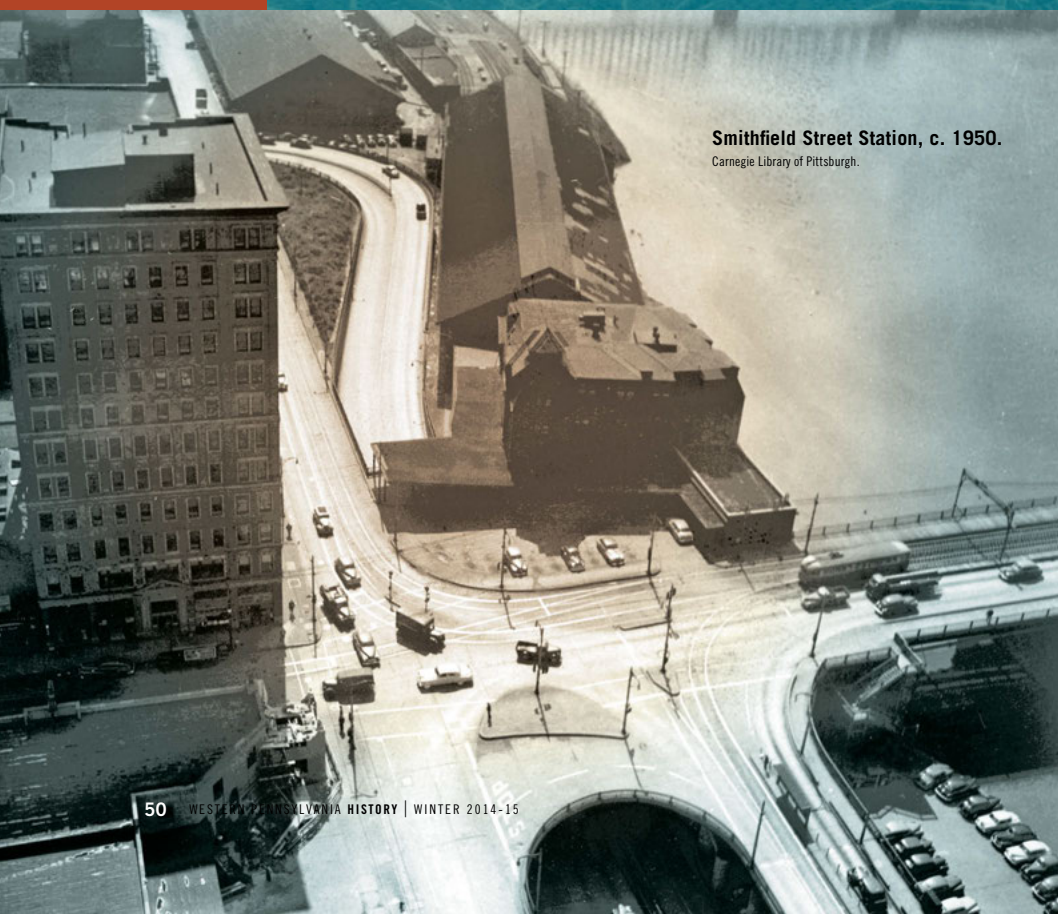


Table 8

Eastern Standard Time

and frequent service was eastbound, along the main line to Derry. At these outlying locations, each railroad maintained a yard where the equipment could be serviced, stored, and, in most cases, turned around for the return trip.

In the late 1940s, you could board a PRR train in Pittsburgh and travel—without changing trains—to end points such as New York, Philadelphia, Washington, Chicago, Detroit, Cincinnati, and St. Louis. At one time you could even traverse a route through Oil City up to Corry and arrive in either Erie or Buffalo, New York!

In 1940, an article in *Trains* magazine reported that each day, between 10 p.m. and 4 a.m., nearly 30 long-distance passenger trains traversed Horseshoe Curve, which was at the crest of the Pennsylvania Railroad's main line over the Allegheny Mountains.⁴ The list of trains included the famous Broadway Limited, both eastbound and westbound, and was an important indicator of the density of railroad passenger traffic to and from Pittsburgh.

Pittsburgh (97 miles west of Horseshoe Curve) was located midway between the Pennsylvania Railroad's major western rail terminals in Chicago and St. Louis and its eastern terminals in New York, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C. All of PRR's trains between these cities went through Pittsburgh. Most were on overnight schedules that required them to stop at Pittsburgh's Penn Station to accommodate passengers, service the locomotives and cars, and change crews.

Over the years, I had traveled on the Pennsylvania Railroad to and from various destinations, always as a coach passenger. In 1966, while living in the Philadelphia area and contemplating an annual Thanksgiving family trip to Pittsburgh, I decided that it was time that I rode in style: over the Horseshoe Curve in the cab of the locomotive. I had been in various cabs on numerous railroads before, but this ride was reputed to be notoriously difficult, if not impossible, to arrange. I accomplished the feat by buying several shares



Learn More Online

Read some of the history behind Station Square in Pittsburgh.



P&LE Station, 1940s.
Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.

PITTSBURGH AND LAKE ERIE RAILROAD



B&O "Shenandoah" at
P&LE Station, c. 1971.
Paul Roth.



George (age 8) and Dan (10) Roth in the cab on Horseshoe Curve, 1966.
Paul Roth.

In 1940, an article in *Trains* magazine reported that each day, between 10 p.m. and 4 a.m., nearly 30 long-distance passenger trains traversed Horseshoe Curve, which was at the crest of the Pennsylvania Railroad's main line over the Allegheny Mountains.

Learn More Online
Learn about Horseshoe Curve in Altoona, Pa.

of stock, then appealing to the company as a stockholder. Whether I had “real clout” or they were just humoring me, it worked!

On the day before Thanksgiving 1966, upon arriving in Altoona on the *Duquesne*, (the New York to Pittsburgh day train), I was escorted, along with my two sons Dan, 10, and George, 8, to the locomotive cab by district supervisor Clyde Ferrin. With engineer John Hoffman and fireman Elmer Snively, we rode up the Horseshoe Curve and on to Johnstown where my sons and I disembarked. I managed to both film and take snapshots of the trip.

One of the most interesting and unusual trains was named *The Pittsburgher*, an overnight train my father used periodically

The westbound *Duquesne* train climbs Horseshoe Curve near Altoona, as seen from the train itself. 1965.

Paul Roth.

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Engineer Hoffman, 1966.

Paul Roth.



that went in both directions between Pittsburgh and New York. It was composed entirely of sleeping cars that provided overnight non-stop service for executives who could then spend the day in New York. These trains provided executives and business travelers the equivalent of a deluxe hotel on wheels. For instance, passengers could board the trains after a day's work, have a relaxed dinner and retire. Late in the evening the trains departed for their destinations, making stops only for servicing and crew change. The trains reached their destinations early in the morning, but passengers could remain aboard to have breakfast before detraining. The only exceptions to the non-stop service were "flag

stops" at stations such as Latrobe, where VIPs could access the train from their country residences in places such as Ligonier. This train lasted until 1960, when Amtrak drastically curtailed passenger service. Servicing of this train was the one of the last remaining functions of the Pittsburgh 28th Street yard and facility.

B&O

The B&O provided frequent commuter trains between downtown Pittsburgh and Versailles until 1975, when the Allegheny County Port Authority took over the trains. Called the PATrain, this lasted until April 1989; long after

commuter rail service in most similarly sized urban areas had been discontinued. For that matter, Western Pennsylvania also temporarily retained its streetcars under Port Authority.

B&O long-distance trains, though less frequent than those of the Pennsylvania Railroad, served most of the same major terminal cities: Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Washington D.C., Philadelphia, and New York. B&O's flagship overnight trains were the all-sleeper *Capital Limited* and the all-coach *Columbian*. I remember traveling on the daylight train, the *Shenandoah*, which provided an outstanding passage between Pittsburgh and Washington D.C. The B&O closely followed a parallel route to the

A commuter train bound for Derry passes the Trafford tower in 1960.

Paul Roth.



DERRY, LATROBE, GREENSBURG, JEANNETTE, IRWIN, PITCAIRN AND PITTSBURGH

Dist.	EASTERN STANDARD TIME	631 Daily Ex. Sun. N.B. Note 1	633 Daily Ex. Sat. & Sun. N.B. Note 1	635 Daily Ex. Sat. & Sun. N.B. Note 1	35 Daily	513 Daily Ex. Sat. & Sun. N.B. Note 1	637 Daily Ex. Sat. & Sun. N.B. Note 1	37 Daily	621 Daily Ex. Sat. & Sun. N.B. Note 1	641 Daily Ex. Sat. & Sun. N.B. Note 1	85 Sun. Only	13 Daily Ex. Sat. & Sun. N.B. Note 1	519 Daily Ex. Sat. & Sun. N.B. Note 1	25 Daily Ex. Sat. & Sun. N.B. Note 1	627 Daily Ex. Sat. & Sun. N.B. Note 1	629 Daily Ex. Sat. & Sun. N.B. Note 1	75 Daily	19 Daily Ex. Sun.	23 Daily
	Leave	AM	AM	AM	AM	AM	AM	AM	AM	PM	PM	PM	PM	PM	PM	PM	PM	PM	PM
0	Derry	4 10	4 45	5 16			5 22	6 08	6 22	6 33 12 40 1 23							6 16	7 47	9 41
4.9	Latrobe	4 21	4 59	5 28	5 44		5 32	6 08	6 22	6 33 12 40 1 23							6 29	8 02	9 41
10.1	Dunblow	4 29					5 40	6 26	6 48 12 57 2 02						3 07				
14.2	Greensburg	4 39	5 15	5 45	5 59		5 49	6 26	6 48 12 57 2 02										
16.1	Radebaugh	4 43	5 20				5 54		6 56									8 57	
17.8	Grapeville	4 46	5 24				6 00		7 02									9 04	
18.3	Jeannette	4 48	5 26	5 52			6 04		7 06									9 09	
19.8	Penn.	4 52	5 30	5 58			6 08												
21.3	Manor	4 56	5 34	6 02			6 11												
22.7	Shafon	4 59	5 37				6 15												
23.6	Irwin	5 02	5 40				6 20												
24.7	Larimer	5 06	5 43				6 22												
25.9	Ardara	5 09	5 46				6 26		6 38						3 24	3 50			
28.4	North Trafford						6 26		6 41						3 53	4 19			
28.0	Trafford	5 14	5 50			6 20	6 29		6 45						4 01	4 27			
29.6	Pitcairn	5 19	5 53			6 24	6 33		6 49						4 04	4 30			
31.2	Wilmerding	5 23	5 57			6 28	6 37		6 53						4 07	4 33			
32.3	Turtle Creek	5 26	6 00	6 15		6 31	6 39 b 6 57		6 54						4 10	4 36			
32.8	East Pittsburgh	5 29	6 03			6 35	6 42		6 59						4 12	4 38			
34.1	Bessemer	5 33	6 06			6 37	6 44		7 01						4 15	4 41			
34.9	Braddock	5 36	6 09			6 40	6 47		7 04						4 18	4 44			
35.4	Copeland	5 38	6 11			6 43	6 50		7 07						4 21	4 47			
36.0	Hawkins	5 41	6 14			6 46	6 53		7 10						4 24	4 50			
36.9	Swissvale	5 44	6 17			6 49	6 56		7 13						4 27	4 53			
37.7	Edgewood	5 47	6 19	6 28		6 52	6 59		7 16						4 30	4 56			
38.4	Wilkinsburg	5 50	6 22			6 55	7 02		7 19						4 33	4 59			
39.4	Homewood	5 53	6 25			6 58	7 05		7 22						4 36	5 02			
40.4	East Liberty	5 56	6 28	6 33	6 45	7 03	7 10		7 25						4 39	5 05			
41.3	Roup	5 59	6 30			7 06	7 13		7 30						4 42	5 08			
41.8	Shadyside	6 01	6 32			7 08	7 15		7 33						4 45	5 11			
45.0	Pittsburgh Ar. (Penna. Sta.)	6 10	6 40	6 45	7 00	7 05	7 12		7 38						4 48	5 14			

Note 1.—Will not run September 1.
b.—Stops on notice to Conductor to discharge passengers.
—Stops only on signal or notice to Agent or Conductor to receive or discharge passengers.
N. B. —No checked baggage handled on this train.
Responsibility.—The Pennsylvania Railroad is not responsible for errors in time tables, inconvenience or damage resulting from delayed trains or failure to make connections. Schedules subject to change without notice.

Form 161—10,000—8-18-52 1st Edition. Printed in U. S. A.

Pittsburgh-Greensburg-Derry

PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD

TIME TABLES

Eastern Standard Time

Pittsburgh
Pitcairn
Irwin
Jeannette
Greensburg
Latrobe
Derry



Go By Train...
SAFETY—WITH SPEED AND COMFORT

Form 161

Effective September 1, 1952

Eastbound express train at Wilkinsburg station, c. 1960.

Paul Roth.



PRR timetable 1952.

HHC L&A, MFF 1473,
PRR Miscellaneous.

Table 8

Western Maryland Railway, which is now the Great Allegheny Passage bike trail. The last eastbound *Shenandoah*, down to one coach, is seen at the P&LE Station in 1971.

P&LE

The Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad (a subsidiary of the New York Central System) provided limited long-distance service on the NYC via a connection in Youngstown, Ohio. Passengers coming from Pittsburgh would be conveyed to Cleveland and Buffalo, although the Buffalo service was quite inconvenient. I remember that the Buffalo-bound coach was switched onto a main-line NYC train at Ashtabula, Ohio, arriving at its destination in the post-midnight hours.

P&LE commuter service was limited to a few trains between Pittsburgh and College (Beaver Falls), with some continuing to Youngstown. When service ended in 1985, it was the last regional commuter train excepting PATrain.

At one time P&LE commuter trains ran south to Brownsville. According to Jim Stedeford, a retired P&LE engineer, and Ken Kobus, a retired Jones & Laughlin/LTV supervisor, this route actually tunneled under the J&L Steel plant on the South Side and then passed by both the J&L and the U.S. Steel Homestead Works in sight of the open hearth furnaces! It is noteworthy that both the B&O and PRR commuter trains passed in close proximity to steel-making processes in McKeesport and Braddock, respectively.

stopping in Pittsburgh in early morning hours, much like their namesake predecessors. It is interesting that these trains follow a hybrid route: Norfolk Southern (ex-PRR) between Chicago and Pittsburgh, and CSX (ex-B&O) between Pittsburgh and Washington D.C.

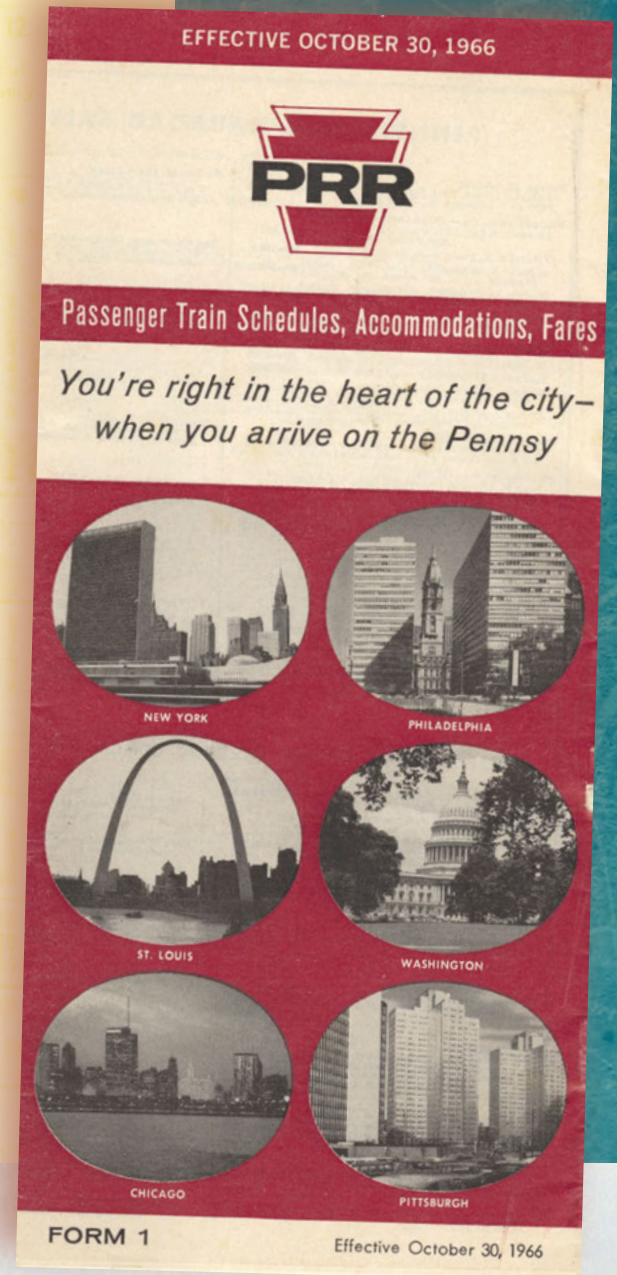
Thus, what was once a thriving passenger rail center now sees merely four long-distance and no commuter trains each day. Two of the four downtown stations still exist, but as different entities. Penn Station at Liberty and Grant, the once-great transportation hub, has lost its yard and function. However, the building itself thrives as a luxury condominium and office building called The Pennsylvanian. Amtrak maintains several tracks and a small office there to serve its remaining pairs of trains. The P&LE Station main building along Carson Street still exists, but the yards and other buildings have long been converted to the Station Square hotel and entertainment complex, with just a token restored caboose as

Last run of the
Pittsburgher.

Paul Roth.

AMTRAK

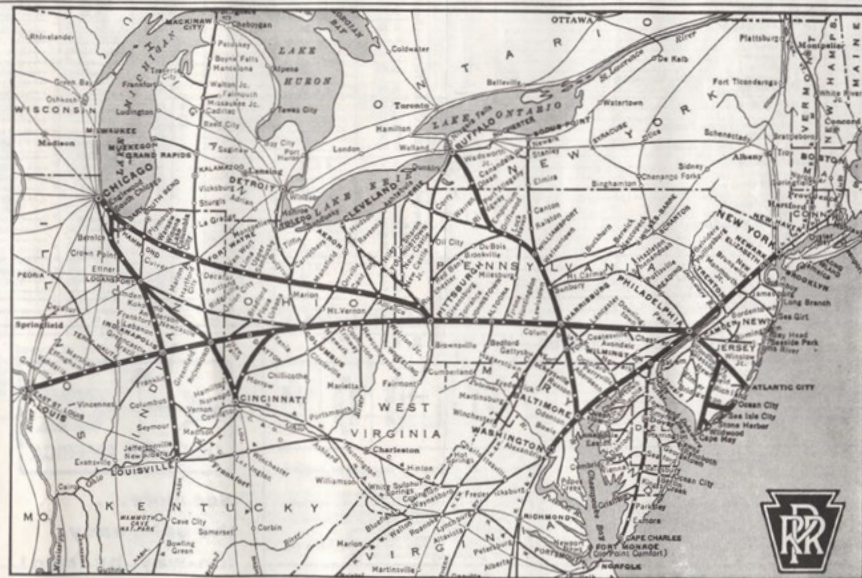
Initially, Amtrak continued many of the trains between New York and the West, but they rapidly devolved into three, then two pairs of trains. At present, only one pair of daylight trains (the *Pennsylvanians*) offer direct service between Pittsburgh and New York. The overnight trains (the *Capital Limiteds*) connect Chicago with Washington D.C.,



**In the late 1940s,
you could board a PRR
train in Pittsburgh
and travel—without
changing trains—to
end points such as New
York, Philadelphia,
Washington, Chicago,
Detroit, Cincinnati, and
St. Louis.**

Pennsylvania Railroad timetable map.
HHC L&A, MFF 1473, PRR Miscellaneous.

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New York and Pittsburgh-Dayton-Indianapolis-St. Louis.....5	



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a reminder of busier days. The B&O Station at Smithfield Street by the Monongahela Wharf was demolished around 1955 for a new depot, the last privately owned train station in the state. It served commuters from 1957 till the McKeesport PATrain service ended in 1989. It was demolished in 1998 and replaced by PNC's Firstside building and, appropriately, a light rail station. As previously mentioned, the Wabash Terminal was destroyed by fire in 1946 and demolished in 1954.

Pittsburgh is not alone in its deterioration of rail passenger service. It at least maintains a minimum amount, while many important regional cities have no service at all, including Fort Wayne, Columbus, and Louisville. Many of the region's suburban stations survive,

though some are derelict and others have been converted to a different use. An interesting example is the Wilksburg station. Its regal head building has long been unoccupied, but the platform area now serves as a station for the East Busway. Some commuter stations, such as those at Greensburg, Latrobe, and Tarentum, have been converted to restaurants, providing at least some connection to the glory days of passenger train travel.

Paul Roth, a retired professor of Computer Science, is a lifelong historian and photographer of railroads. His photographic book series, *Railroad Vistas*, currently comprises three volumes. He is also a musicologist whose "Pittsburgh's Dance Band Era" appeared in the Fall 2013 issue of this magazine. He is a

graduate of McKeesport High with degrees from the Universities of Pittsburgh and Pennsylvania. He thanks Brian O'Neill for his help with this article.

Pat Finkel is a retired nurse and a former volunteer at the History Center. She wrote "An Officer and a Gentleman" for this magazine in 2010, and is co-author of "Pittsburgh's Dance Band Era" with Paul Roth.

- ¹ *Official Guide of the Railways*, August 1958 (New York: National Railway Publication Co., 1958).
- ² The P&WV was constructed as the eastern end of the Wabash Railroad.
- ³ Trains reached the terminal via a tunnel under Mt. Washington and a bridge over the Ohio River. The tunnel is now a rush-hour auto route and the stone bridge piers still exist.
- ⁴ Harry T. Sohlberg. Horseshoe Curve. *Trains*. March, 1940.



Amtrak *Pennsylvanian* attendants, Pittsburgh, 1991.

Paul Roth.

BELOW: Amtrak *Capitol Limited* emerges from Schenley Tunnel, October 2014. The day this was taken, the train was 5 hours late due to track congestion.

Paul Roth.



What was once a thriving passenger rail center now sees merely four long-distance and no commuter trains each day. Two of the four downtown stations still exist, but as different entities.

