

BRIEF HISTORY OF RAILROADS IN THE CUMBERLAND AREA

With the beginning of the Nineteenth Century, the United States became characterized by two trends: westward expansion and industrialization. Because of Cumberland's location, this city would be important in the development of both national trends, and would become a major transportation center.

During the second quarter of the Nineteenth Century, two forms of transportation vied for supremacy east of the Appalachians: the canal and the railroad. The canal used proven, centuries-old technology and offered the advantage of heavy tonnage. The railroad was based on new, uncertain technology and offered the advantage of speed. The Chesapeake & Ohio Canal and the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad both began construction on the same auspicious day, 4 July 1828. The race was on to build an effective form of transportation, with both canal and railroad heading westward up the Potomac Valley to reach the Ohio Valley. The railroad was first to arrive in Cumberland in 1842, eight years ahead of the canal.

With industrialization of the United States, coal became a primary resource in demand among the metropolitan areas along the East coast. Large quantities of this useful mineral were found in the Georges Creek and Jennings Run Valleys of Allegany County, Maryland, just west of Cumberland. The railroad proved to be the most effective form of transportation from mine to both the canal basin and railhead. Two short line railroads emerged to provide this service: the Cumberland & Pennsylvania Railroad, which had its origin in 1845 with a line from Mt. Savage to Cumberland on the first iron rails rolled in the United States; and the Georges Creek Railroad, which operated a line down to Piedmont during the period 1853-1863, before being acquired by the C&P Railroad.

Meanwhile, in 1849, after a seven year pause, the B&O Railroad continued its westward progress up the Potomac Valley,

reaching Piedmont in 1851, then struggling up the Seventeen Mile Grade over the Allegheny Mountains. This route of the B&O went on to Grafton in 1852 and to Wheeling in 1853, finally achieving its goal in the Ohio Valley. By 1857, direct rail route was completed between Baltimore, Cincinnati and St. Louis.

Soon after the Civil War, and continuing into the early Twentieth Century, railroads quickly expanded in the Cumberland area. In 1871, the B&O completed its Cumberland-to-Pittsburgh line, which heads northwest through the Narrows, following the Wills Creek Valley up Sand Patch Grade. Using the opposite side of the Narrows was the Pennsylvania Railroad in Maryland, which by 1879 had established a branch line to Cumberland from Bedford and Altoona. The Georges Creek & Cumberland Railroad began operating in 1881 to Lonaconing as a rival to the C&P Railroad for the lucrative coal trade. By 1887, the Piedmont & Cumberland Railway of the West Virginia Central (WVC) system connected Cumberland with the resources of the Potomac highlands. The Western Maryland Railroad line between Hagerstown and Cumberland was completed in 1906, and its Connellsville extension was constructed in 1910-12.

In a pattern of consolidation which would become common, the WM Railroad gained control of the WVC system in 1905, the GC&C Railroad in 1907, and the C&P Railroad in 1944. In turn, the Western Maryland was absorbed into the Chessie System (now CSX) in 1973, which had been formed from the merger of the B&O and C&O railroads. Although the rail scene in Cumberland has changed considerably, this city has the CSX Locomotive Shops, which service over 850 diesel units each quarter, and the Car Maintenance Facility, which repair more than 2,200 cars each month. CSX coal and freight trains can be seen passing through the Cumberland area, and Amtrak's **Capitol Limited** provides daily passenger service between Washington and Pittsburgh, and points beyond. Scheduled excursion trains of the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad operate between Cumberland and Frostburg.