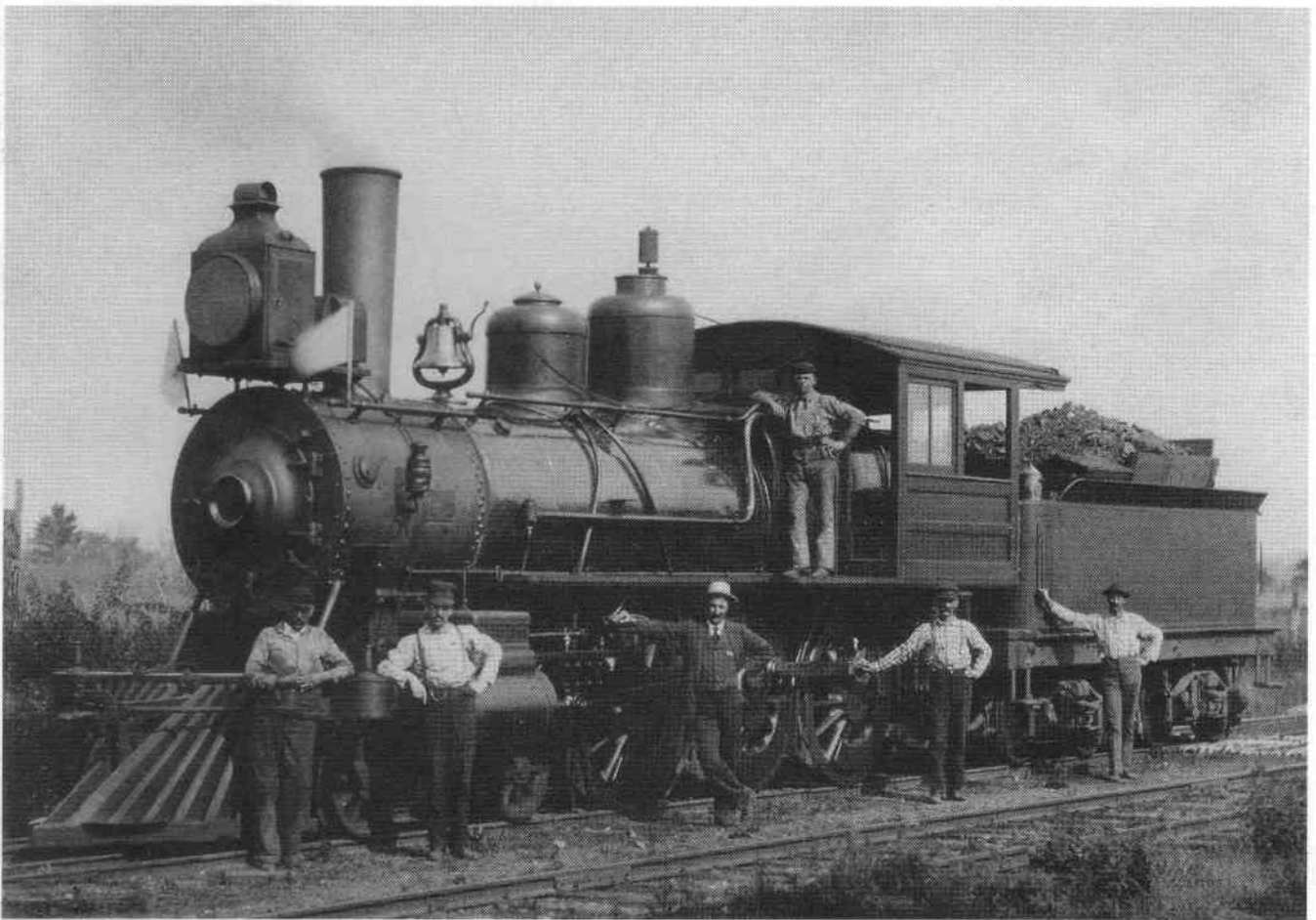


RAILROADS OF BUTLER COUNTY

By Jim Blount



This CH&D Railroad crew posed about 1900 near Stockton in Fairfield Township. The 4-6-0 steam locomotive, No. 317, was built by Baldwin.

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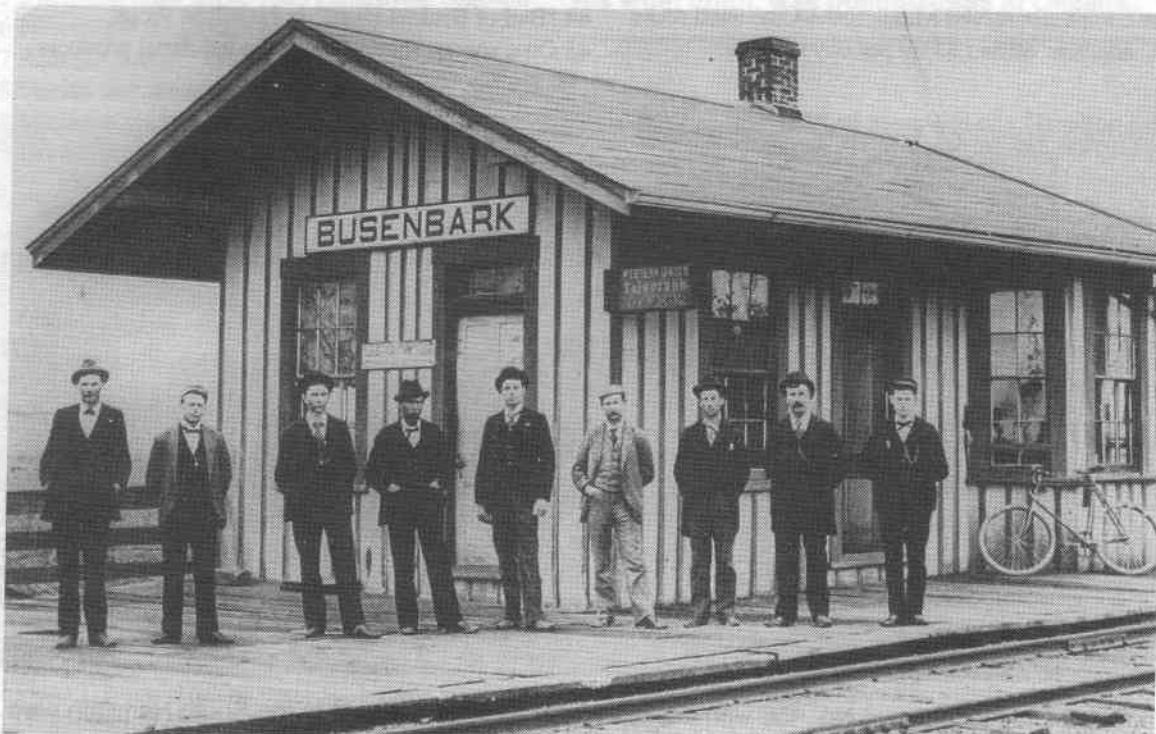


RAILROADS OF BUTLER COUNTY

By Jim Blount

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Top: Collinsville depot, about 1910. Bottom: Busenbark Depot, 1897

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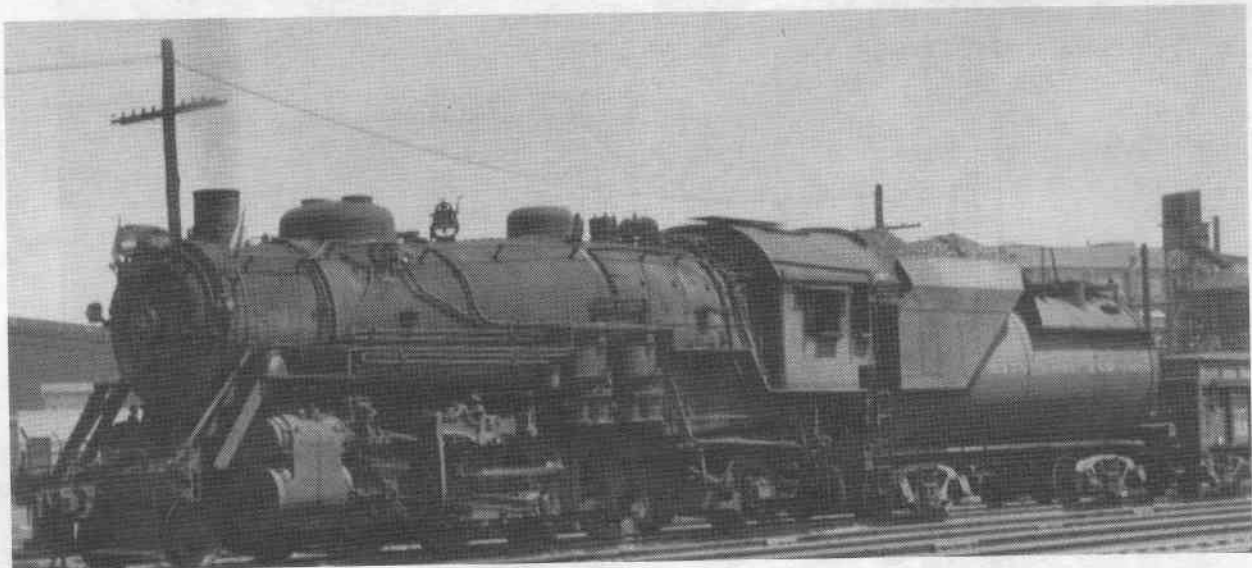
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Baltimore & Ohio locomotive No. 456 with a 2-8-2 wheel arrangement sat in the South Hamilton yard in August 1957 before making a local run to Middletown. It was the last steam locomotive to operate through Butler County, according to local railroad expert Dan Finfrock, who provided the photo.

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Carl H. (Babe) Skjoldager of Okeana worked 42 years as a maintenance of way employee for the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad. Skjoldager is shown in the late 1930s or early 1940s inspecting track. His wife, Edith, was postmistress at Okeana.

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Inside back cover - Map of western part of PRR

Earliest railroads 'rude and simple affairs'

"The children of this day can hardly imagine what rude and simple affairs the earliest railroads were," said William Dean Howells, writing in 1897.

Howells -- a literary giant from the last decades of the 19th century until his death in 1920 -- said "it was a time of great excitement and expectation" as railroads connected American communities.

Howells was qualified to relate the reaction to the coming of the rail age. He lived through its early years after his family moved from Hamilton to Dayton in 1848.

"Instead of long smooth steel rails which now carry the great trains, with their luxurious cars, in their never-ceasing flight, day in and day out the whole year round," the rails were "flat bands of iron, spiked to wooden rails," recalled Howells, who was a teenager when the first railroads came to Ohio.

The bands of flat iron, he explained, "formed the path of the small carriages drawn by a locomotive of the size and shape of a threshing machine engine."

Howells said "these (trains) amazed by a speed of 10 to 12 miles an hour the gaping spectator whose grandchildren do not turn their heads to look at the express as it makes its 60 miles in 60 minutes."

"In the very beginning, indeed, the carriages were drawn by horses, and it was several years before steam was used," he added in his book, *Stories of Ohio*, published in 1897.

"Little by little the railroads began to be built on the easy levels of the state, and before a great while a line was projected from Cincinnati to Columbus along the course of the Little Miami River."

"This was completed piecemeal, from point to point, and at last carried through. In the meantime other lines were laid out, and then all at once the railroad era was at hand," he wrote.

The Little Miami Railroad, the first in Southwestern Ohio, was completed between Cincinnati and Springfield Aug. 10, 1846.

Officials in Cincinnati viewed the Little Miami as a mixed blessing. They coveted the economic benefits, but legislated against its risks.

At first, city fathers wouldn't allow the locomotive belching smoke and steam into Cincinnati for fear that sparks would start fires. Instead, Little Miami trains had to be pulled into town by mules.

Howells enjoyed eight years of his childhood (ages 3-11) in Hamilton. It was the canal age when he was growing up in the town of about 3,000 people in the 1840s.

During that decade, the fastest form of transportation in Butler County was a canalboat on the Miami-Erie Canal that eventually connected Lake Erie and the Ohio River via the Butler County towns of Middletown, Excello, Hamilton, Rialto and Port Union.

The speed limit on Ohio canals was four miles an hour -- about twice as fast as the average speed of the earliest stagecoaches in the state's southwestern corner.

A trip between Hamilton and Cincinnati by stagecoach initially required 14 hours, if on schedule. By canalboat, the same journey was halved, to seven hours. When the first railroad opened in the county in 1851, it took about an hour to travel between the cities.

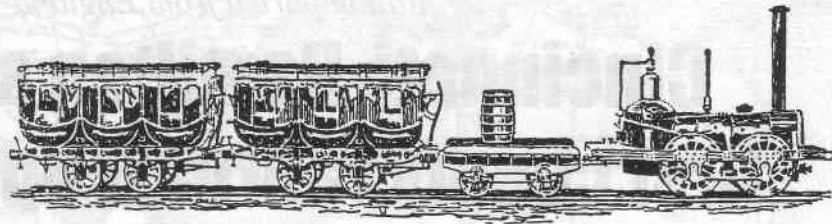
As "canal fever" had infested the Midwest in the 1820s, so did "railroad fever" from the 1830s into the 1850s.

Civic leaders with a sense of history and economics realized that, at first, it was towns on navigable rivers that prospered and became business centers and growing communities.

Then, in the 1820-1840 era, canal towns experienced economic growth.

In Butler County an example is Jacksonburg in Wayne Township. It was a major stop on the road between Cincinnati (to the south) and Preble and Darke counties (to the north). Quickly after its founding in 1816, Jacksonburg became the commercial and population center in northern Butler County.

Bands of flat iron "formed the path of the small carriages drawn by a locomotive of the size and shape of a threshing-machine engine," traveling as fast as 10 to 12 miles an hour.



William Dean Howells

To the east, Middletown and the surrounding area was on relatively flat land, ideal for canal construction. That's where work began in 1825 on building the Miami-Erie Canal. By 1830, Middletown had replaced Jacksonburg as a business magnet and surpassed its population.

The lesson wasn't lost when "railroad fever" struck Butler County leaders, but it took more than enthusiasm to build a railroad.

The uncertain task required leadership and capital, the latter usually in short supply in Ohio towns in the 1800s. There also were unsettled questions about track, locomotives and rolling stock during the trial-and-error period of railroading.

Complications included financial panics -- later called depressions -- including crises that hit in 1837 and 1857.

Despite the obstacles, by the end of the Civil War (1865), three railroads radiated north and northwest from Hamilton -- the Cincinnati, Hamilton & Dayton; the Eaton & Hamilton; and the Cincinnati, Hamilton & Indianapolis.

In 1872, service began directly into Middletown over the Short Line, later known as the Big Four and New York Central.

Still later, Middletown benefited from the building of the Middletown & Cincinnati and its connections with the Cincinnati, Lebanon & Northern and the Dayton, Lebanon & Cincinnati, all eventually part of the Pennsylvania Railroad.

The PRR entered Hamilton in 1888, a year after the Louisville, Cincinnati & Dayton offered another Hamilton-Middletown link.

Around the turn of the century, the Hamilton Belt Line and the Chicago, Cincinnati & Louisville (later Chesapeake & Ohio) built within Butler County.

Industrial growth led to the unique Armco Hot Line in the late 1920s.

In mid 1999, much of the track of those companies remain in service in the county, but the names have changed. Recent designations have included Penn Central, Conrail, Norfolk & Western, Norfolk Southern, Chessie System, Great Miami and Amtrak.

This book is about the Railroads of Butler County. It is *not* a complete history. Such a work would swell with a mass of statistics, technical descriptions and business summaries.

Few details of railroad incorporations, acquisitions, mergers, receiverships, foreclosures, leases, operating agreements and reorganizations are included in the text. They appear in several chronologies.

Names of stations and mileage between them are in tables which, in most cases, were compiled from multiple sources.

Instead, the emphasis is on people -- those who built the railroads, the employees, the passengers who rode them, the farmers who shipped milk and hogs, and the citizens who depended on railroads to deliver goods and services and transport the products of both rural and urban areas to the nation and world.

Gone are the imposing steam locomotives, the cabooses, enticing weekend excursion rates, the popular theater train, the colorful circus trains, the Ohio State Limited, the Cincinnati, summer specials to Michigan and winter trains to Florida, and the unique hot metal cars -- all reminders of the days when railroads dominated the Butler County economy and its lifestyles.

The railroads haven't vanished. They've changed, and are flourishing. The power is provided by diesel locomotives, auto racks seem to outnumber box cars, strings of trucks whip by on rail wheels, orange juice has joined coal as a rail import, Amtrak operates in relative obscurity because of its early morning schedule, and only two major railroads serve the county -- CSX and Norfolk Southern.

Rail imported from England

Cincinnati, Hamilton & Dayton, first county railroad, open in 1851

Butler County's first railroad -- the Cincinnati, Hamilton & Dayton -- was at least five to six years in the making.

The ceremonial opening, Sept. 18, 1851, followed years of planning, securing capital, buying right-of-way and obtaining scarce track and equipment.

Rail, for example, had to be imported from England. It arrived in New Orleans and was hauled to Ohio by steamboats. The order was for 6,000 tons of iron, at \$35 a ton. A thousand men were hired to clear and grade the line between Hamilton and Cincinnati.

An experienced railroad builder, Robert M. Shoemaker, was hired in 1849 to construct the road. He had been chief engineer of the Mad River & Lake Erie and the Little Miami railroads since 1838.

Original backers included William Bebb, Lewis D. Campbell, John W. Erwin, E. R. Ruder, Charles K. Smith, Aaron L. Schenck, Francis J. Titus, Abner Enoch, Dr. Andrew Campbell, Samuel Dick, George W. Wren, Solomon Banker, John W. Millikin, Alex P. Miller, O. S. Campbell, Samuel Snively, William Hunter, Sigismund Wurmser, O. S. Caldwell, Taylor Webster, James McBride and John Woods, all from Butler County.

The prominent Hamilton and Middletown men were joined by business and civic leaders from Hamilton County (Cincinnati) and Montgomery County (Dayton).

Among those playing key roles were Engineer Shoemaker; Bebb, Ohio's governor, 1846-1849; Woods, state auditor, 1845-1851; and Stephen S. L'Hommedieu, an influential Cincinnati banker and publisher.

By 1849, a total of \$3 million in capital had been obtained.

The festive first run two years later operated at 30 miles an hour on the new roadbed. That day about 2,000 visitors came to Hamilton, then a city of 3,210 people.

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"It was notable among the railroad enterprises of that decade from the fact that it was

built entirely without township aid, and without state aid of any sort," wrote Edward Hungerford, speaking of the CH&D.

"Within less than a month after the first train had run out upon the line, the citizens of Cincinnati had completed payment of a total of over \$750,000 in cash on first subscriptions for its stock," Hungerford said in his book, *The Story of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad*.

"The rest of the stock and the first series of bonds were quickly disposed of in New York. All in all, as clean and as quick a bit of financing as the land had ever known, and almost without a parallel in its railroad history," Hungerford noted.

Writing on the same subject, Henry A. Ford and Kate B. Ford, historians of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, said that "it was the first case of the kind, and is said to have surprised the brokers of Gotham very thoroughly. Western railroad securities had not theretofore been placed in that city without suffering large discounts, selling for but 80 to 85 cents on the dollar."

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In 1863, CH&D fares from Hamilton included: Cincinnati, 90 cents; Trenton, 30 cents; Middletown, 45 cents; Dayton, \$1.25; and Jones Station in Fairfield Township, 20 cents.

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In 1878, the CH&D operated 35 daily passenger trains to and through Hamilton. But the company was in receivership and three months behind in paying its employees.

The railroad gradually recovered. By 1886 its stock was up to \$150 a share and paying an 8 percent dividend

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Change has been a constant in the railroad business, exemplified by the CH&D's 68-year struggle through a maze of incorporations, reorganizations, name changes, regulatory actions, rate wars, pool and joint operating agreements, leases, spin-offs and mergers on its way to being acquired by the Baltimore & Ohio in 1917.

At first, CH&D officials looked north to connections to Troy, Piqua, Sidney, Lima and