

BEN AVON AREA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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www.benavon.com/BAAHA
mailto: baaha@benavon.org

My Dad's Life at Clifton Station

by Pam Cerceo

My father Carl H. Fredrick, recently deceased at age 84 told me many stories of his fascinating life as a "railroader" growing up in Emsworth at the Clifton Station in the 1930s and 1940s. My hope is any reader who knew him, his sister Ruth Fredrick (recently deceased) from Sewickley, or family and can share their memories with me and my family. I would also be interested in pictures anyone might have. *[Ed. Note – email to the above address will be forwarded.]*

Here are some things I know from him. At around age 6 (1932) he and his younger sister Ruth, age 4, and mom, Ebba (or Vera) came to live at the station with his father Carl C. Fredrick who was then Stationmaster as well as a conductor for the Pennsylvania Railroad.

They were allowed to live at the station, as long as they paid one dollar a year rent and kept the waiting room for passengers warm in the cold months with coal that was dropped off by train in front of the station.

My dad and his family were able to ride the train for free and used that as a main form of transportation to and from the other stations and into Pittsburgh. He

continued to enjoy free train transportation throughout his life as a retired railroader.

When the train his dad was on while working as a conductor would pass the station, he would blow the whistle to signal his family.

The stationhouse was a gingerbread design with two floors. [see photo, page two] The only access to the stationhouse was the stairway leading down the cliff from the street above.



Passing the Clifton Station platform

Upstairs were three bedrooms. A living area, kitchen and washroom were downstairs. The washroom only had a sink. There was no tub or toilet so they had to use an outhouse and bathe in a round metal tub while crouching down and pouring water over themselves. I now have one of his tubs.

My dad saved many items which I am fortunate enough to have inherited from him such as an oil lamp from his grandfather, a basin used to wash in, a "pot", a spittoon, PRR memorabilia, and other personal items. There was no heat in the house and so to keep the beds

I have his 8th grade autograph book which Jack Latshaw signed among other classmates and friends. Names such as Jack Griffith, Richard Seligman, Howard Smith, Shires Holmes, Danny Bartholomi, Robert Hoover, Earl Baker, Anna Baker, Bob Vogel, Sylvia Davis, "Slaps", Ruth



warm in the winter he would heat up bricks on the stove and put them under the covers at the foot of his bed. His family was poor which is why he learned how to fix anything, such as putting cardboard in the bottom of his worn shoe soles to cover up the holes.

My dad had many pet animals while living at the station, among them were a dog, many cats, rabbits and chickens.

As a boy he fished and swam a lot in the Ohio River, worked as a paperboy and soda jerk behind the counter at Latshaw's. He was a delivery boy for a grocery store.

Schauerhumner, Patricia Kelly, Elaine Lottes, Alfred Vogel, Howard Knight, and Bob Sayre. I also have his 8th grade graduation picture.

On Sundays he went to Holy Family (the orphanage) to watch them play football. That is how he came to know and love the game. He also attended Emsworth United Presbyterian Church including their Sabbath School from which I have the inscribed bible he received in 1939.

He and his family would enjoy listening to the radio for entertainment and liked the show "Gangbusters" among others. He also loved going to the

theaters. Among his favorite movies were "The Prisoner of Zenda" and "Gunga Din".

Ice cream was a special treat for my dad. When he got a paycheck he would buy himself a pint of it and sit up on the hill of Clifton Station and eat the entire carton. He promised himself that when he made a lot of money one day he would eat it every single night. Needless to say my dad did eat ice cream almost every evening during his lifetime. A vivid memory my dad always told was that at dinner time his mom would tell him to go up the hill to get his dad in the bar that he would go to after work. It seems that his dad was a very well-liked man with a social network of friends in a local bar. He was nicknamed "Goodtime Charlie" by his friends.



Carl H. and Carl C. Fredrick (1940)
on stairway leading to Clifton Station

Another memory of his was that of getting ice for their icebox which hung out of the kitchen window. It was not often

that they had ice so when they did it was a treat to be able to have cold food.

October 23, 1940 when he was 2 months shy of his 14th birthday he was taken out of school (Emsworth) to hear the devastating news that his father had fallen from the hill and landed on the railroad tracks below Clifton Station and his body severed in two by an oncoming train. His father was 44 years old. My dad never knew more about the circumstances leading up to the accident other than what he was told as a kid that day. They told him maybe his dad had fallen from the hill due to his leg being in a cast from an earlier accident.

Two years later at 16 he dropped out of school to work various jobs to support his mom and sister. At age 18 he starting working for the PRR in the yard. At 20 years old my dad met my mom at a dance hall in Pittsburgh.

She recalls the first time he took her to meet his mom and sister at the stationhouse. "After we got off the trolley we walked until we came to the end of a street on top of a hill overlooking the Ohio River and train tracks. He led me to the top of some steps with a railing. I kept saying 'where are we going?'. As we proceeded to walk down the winding steps I could see a structure perched on the hill. The steps eventually led us right to the stationhouse. I can also remember a train coming by, the loud roar, and shaking of the house and then the whistle blare and steam as it passed the stationhouse only 30 feet below us."

The family lived at the station until he was 21 years old when they were told they could no longer stay (we are not sure why). They then moved to Bellevue where my dad lived until he married my

mom 5 years later. They had 4 children, 8 grandchildren and 1 great grandchild. They celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary 2 months before he passed away recently on August 18, 2011.

My dad will always be remembered by those of us who knew and loved him as a humble person who would go out of his way to help anyone no matter what it

question especially when it pertained to the bible or history.

He seldom spoke of the two times he saved a man's life. One time he grabbed a man working on the tracks out of the way of an oncoming train. He saved an article about himself at age 11 pulling a drowned victim from the Ohio River. Another article is about him saving a 21



Fredrick family photo on the cliff: Ebba (Vera), Ruth, Carl H. and Carl C. taken in the early 1930s

took, to be able to fix anything, who had a strong family commitment and took joy in simple everyday pleasures

For someone who dropped out of school he could answer almost any

year old man from drowning in the river.

My dad retired from the railroad in Philadelphia after 44 years of working for the PRR which became Penn Central and then Conrail. In time he advanced to

management positions and always held life growing up at Clifton Station, the railroad and all that it encompasses dear to his heart.

Railroad History Websites

BAAHA Links #7: by John Warren

For this "links" we complement the feature article about the Clifton station by highlighting some websites aimed at folks with an interest in railroad history.

In search of some recommendations, we contacted Ed Cronin, an Avonworth classmate who now lives in Crawford County. Ed is active in the French Creek Valley Railroad Historical Society (<http://www.fcvrhs.org>), and is working on a project to create a museum in Meadville, celebrating the industrial heritage of Northwestern Pennsylvania.

Ed shared our request with a couple of his colleagues, and his friend Nate Clark promptly supplied us with a list of seven sites. We'll provide a brief description of each one below, and then wrap up the article by mentioning two other sites that might be of interest.

The Pennsylvania Railroad Technical & Historical Society should be a good starting point for anyone researching the PRR. The site includes more than 1500 diagrams of PRR equipment – everything from locomotives to observation cars. (http://www.prrths.com/National%20Page%20Links/PRR_Default.html)

A link on the PRR site led to a 12-page document titled Salvaging History. The surviving records of the PRR, too massive to be handled by any single institution, are stored in nine separate facilities scattered across this quadrant of the U.S. The author, Christopher Baer,

directed a 20-year effort to preserve and index those records. (<http://www.prrths.com/Hagley/salvaginghistory2005.pdf>)

The website of the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie Railroad Historical Society includes photographs, a chronology, and information on models of P&LE facilities and equipment. Founded in 1875, the railroad served the steel industry in the Pittsburgh region for more than a century. This organization publishes a 24-page quarterly magazine and holds monthly meetings at a restaurant in McKees Rocks. (<http://www.plerrhs.org/society/history.shtml>)

The B&LE Board is a discussion site for railroad enthusiasts, including model railroaders. It focuses on the Bessemer & Lake Erie Railroad, which is best known for hauling iron ore to Pittsburgh from the port of Conneaut on Lake Erie. The site includes photos and links to Youtube videos about the B&LE. (<http://bessemerandlakeerie.proboards.com/>)

The Pittsburgh & West Virginia Railway Company served the coal industry along a line that ran from Connellsville to a junction point west of Steubenville. The link takes you to the site's History page, where the narrative is illustrated with photographs and a map. From the bottom of the page, you can reach the site's Home page, and find your way to lots of other material about the P&WV. (<http://www.thepwviline.com/PWVHistory.htm>)

The Union Railroad connected with the P&WV and delivered the coal to the steel plants in the Mon Valley. Since 1896, the Union RR has connected with other railroads to perform this switching function, transporting raw materials into

the plants and returning finished products for delivery. For a good overview of its operations, Nate suggested a Wikipedia entry

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_Railroad_%28Pittsburgh,_Pennsylvania%29).

The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Historical Society (<http://www.borhs.org/>) has more than 1300 members. They maintain a warehouse full of B&O records, and hold a convention and two regional conferences every year. The organization publishes a quarterly magazine and a periodical for modelers. At the bottom of the Home page are links to samples of these very impressive publications.

For those whose railroad interests range across the country, Nate suggested a visit to the History page at the website of the Union Pacific railroad. The UP will celebrate its 150th birthday on July 1. One glance at the menu on this page reveals that the archive contains such resources as maps, architectural drawings, and photographs taken during the original construction of the transcontinental railroad. (<http://www.uprr.com/aboutup/history/index.shtml>)

To supplement Nate's recommendations, we can suggest Southwest Pennsylvania Rails, a website with content that should appeal to someone who is simply interested in viewing or photographing railroad sites in the Pittsburgh area. The site contains 27 photo galleries of snapshots (mostly contemporary) taken at locations in the vicinity of Pittsburgh. (<http://www.swparails.com/>)

At the Home page, click 'View Map' to bring up a map containing 27 clickable markers. Clicking 'Conway Yard', for

example, pops up the first picture in the Conway Yard photo gallery. Clicking the picture takes you to a gallery containing 15 snapshots of that location. Each thumbnail in the gallery can be clicked, to view the full-size photo. In the introduction to the gallery, the author includes information on vantage points, security restrictions, parking, and nearby restaurants.

For railroad photographs dating backing into the 19th century, we recommend the Images section of the Historic Pittsburgh website. Enter a search on 'railroad' and you will get 2428 hits, displayed 20 to a page as clickable thumbnails. You will find photographs of long-vanished stations, portraits of railroad magnates, and scanned railroad timetables. The temptation to browse is irresistible! (<http://digital.library.pitt.edu/images/pittsburgh/>)

That list of sites should keep the railroad enthusiasts among our readers busy for a while! Many thanks to Ed Cronin and Nate Clark for their assistance.

This article is the seventh in a series spotlighting websites which focus on local history, and thus might be interesting to readers of this newsletter.

As you may know, each issue of the newsletter can already be found at the BAAHA website. Thanks to Jeff Cieslak (our webmaster), you can read the newsletter online as an HTML page or display it as a PDF file. The PDF version of the newsletter can also be printed or downloaded. Share it with family and friends, and convince them to join BAAHA!

Cemetery Lore

by Bob Kiser

How many times have you seen this pyramid and wondered about it? Traveling along Cemetery Lane in Ross Township, it is on the right, in Rosemont United Cemetery.



Starting from Perrysville Avenue, we first pass the Jewish, the Catholic, and then come to Rosemont just before the driveway to the very large Masonic Hall. Twelve yards away from the pyramid is the grave (with his photo) of Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916). Pastor Russell founded a congregation of several couples called THE BIBLE STUDENTS on Arch Street on Pittsburgh's North Side, not far from The Priory, in the late 1870s. They practiced baptism by immersion, using the Bellevue Baptist Church for this purpose, as they believed their church should not own property.

In 1884 this group change their name to "THE WATCHTOWER bible and tract SOCIETY", which is still the legal name of the Jehovah Witness Organization, which is the name they adopted in 1931. In 1921, or five years after Pastor Russell's death, The Watchtower bible and tract

Society erected the pyramid in his memory, and to honor the organization.



If you search the internet using <Charles Taze Russell gravesite> you can see more photos or videos of both his grave and the pyramid. Some videos have audio descriptions and some opinion comments as well. Interestingly, this religion, with some millions of followers, had its beginning so close to us, and likely most of us never knew it.

Information for this article was furnished by Jane and Ralph Rose (his parents were members of Pastor Russell's group) and Google.

Memorial Day

Local readers are welcome join us at the Log House, open from 11:30 AM to 1:30 PM. Others are encouraged to find and support an activity near to them. Take a moment to remember those killed in service to preserve our liberty.

Ben Avon Area Historical Association
 c/o 136 Dickson Avenue
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 Pittsburgh, PA 15202



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