

BEN AVON AREA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

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High Bridge in Motion

by John Warren

Good morning, cousin! I hope you slept well. You know all too well how chilly that guest room can get! This is going to be a cold Saturday here in Bellevue, but not as cold as it would be for you back home in Meadville!

In any case, when we look back on today, November 25, 1922, it won't be because of the weather. We'll be remembering our walk across the bridge!

Now help yourself to some cereal, and I'll pour your coffee. It was great to hear all the family news last night. In just five days, I'll be in Meadville for Thanksgiving dinner, and thanks to you I now have a clearer picture of what it will be safe to talk about!

Deciding to Live in Bellevue

You were asking about this apartment. It's been 25 years! Can you believe it? During my first three years in Bellevue I lived in a couple of different places. But then in the summer of 1897, I watched this place being built, and I was the first tenant to move in. I like being just half a block from the trolley stop, and climbing the stairs to the top floor keeps me in shape.

I'm sure you remember another top-floor apartment – actually just a single

room – where I lived when I first moved to Pittsburgh from Meadville. Quite a contrast to this comfortable place!

That was the summer of 1892, the same year you started at Allegheny College. The letter of recommendation from our grandfather got me in the door at the J. R. Weldin stationery store on Wood Street. The timing was really fortunate. They were just recovering from a disastrous fire. Business was picking up, and they needed another junior clerk.

I got the job in the morning, and I found a place to live that afternoon. A respectable boarding house in a semi-respectable neighborhood, just a few blocks from Allegheny General Hospital. At first, I thought I was lucky to get a room on the top floor, at the back. The stairs didn't bother me, and I figured I would be farther away from the street noise. I didn't realize how hot it would be in the summer! And if I opened my window to cool my room off, I got the noise and fumes from the paint factory across the alley!

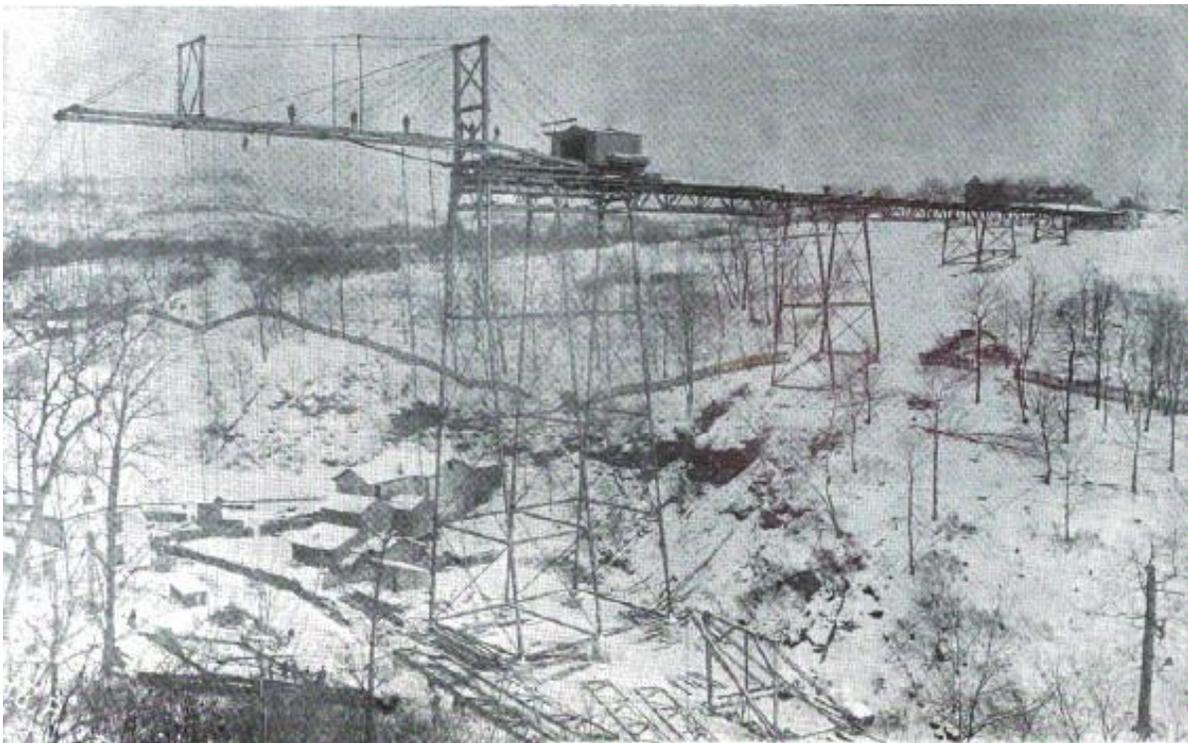
Living in a neighborhood where I could walk to work was convenient, but those other conditions prompted me to begin looking for a place that would be cleaner and quieter. That would mean living a bit farther from downtown, and riding the trolley to work.

In the fall of 1892, I began spending Sunday afternoons on the trolley, exploring the Pittsburgh area. I would climb on a trolley downtown and ride it to the end of the line, looking at the neighborhoods and talking to the motorman, if he was friendly. And then on Monday, I would scan the ads for apartments in any of the neighborhoods I had liked.

It was a bright day in October when I decided to try the trolley route that ran

The next Sunday, I made the short trip by train along the Ohio River to the Bellevue station. From the station, there was a long uphill hike to the town itself. It was a small community in those days – less than 1,500 people – with homes, stores, churches, and a school.

But I could see that the terrain was well suited for expansion, and with a trolley connection to Allegheny and Pittsburgh, the place would really take off! At that point, I made my decision. I



This is the illustration of the bridge under construction that appeared in *American Engineer and Railroad Journal* in 1893. The projecting arm of the traveling derrick was 115 feet long.

along California Avenue. The tracks ended in a loop at the edge of a wide and deep ravine. “End of the line,” I said regretfully. “Not for long,” the motorman responded. “Next year, the company is going to bridge that ravine, and you’ll be able to ride through Bellevue and Avalon to a loop at the next big ravine.” That was the first time I had heard about the plans for the Jack’s Run Bridge.

would stay where I was in Allegheny for another year, save as much money as I could, and then move to Bellevue as soon as there was a trolley connection.

Walking the Carline

Did you get enough to eat? Good. Let’s walk over to the bridge and see what they’re doing. Make sure you have

your gloves. If the wind kicks up, it will be cold out on that bridge!

You know, on a typical Saturday I hustle down these steps to the street, and then quickly cover the half-block to the corner of Lincoln and Fremont. That gives me a chance to duck into the drugstore and buy a copy of the morning paper to read during the trolley ride downtown.

But today is definitely not a typical Saturday. Everything today is special – a day off from work, a companion to walk with, and something extraordinary to see. But here we are at the drugstore, so let's grab a paper.

Okay, now are you ready for a walk? It's barely half a mile from here to the bridge, and we can take our time. You know, back in the drugstore, it sure was easy to pick out that group of dyed-in-the-wool sports fans, wasn't it? They were arguing about this afternoon's Army-Navy game, while everybody else was talking about the bridge! Quite a few familiar faces in there, but that's to be expected when you've lived in a community for almost 29 years. January of 1894 – that's when I moved to Bellevue. Just a few months after the bridge opened.

It would have been the spring of '94 when you first visited me in Bellevue, and we took our first walk along the main street. That's the year when folks began to call it the "carline." From here, it's almost a mile-and-a-half to the Avalon Loop, and we set a pretty swift pace in those days! I remember that we stood at the edge of the Spruce Run ravine and wondered when it would be crossed by a bridge.

That first walk came at a good time, because you got to see the boroughs when they were just beginning to feel the

impact of the trolley line. In the next few years, each time we made that walk, you could spot things that had changed – a store just opening for business, or a new side street being constructed. During the first half-dozen years of trolley service, the population of each borough doubled. By 1900, Bellevue had about 3,400 and Avalon had 2,100 residents. Ben Avon and Emsworth each had under 1,000 in 1900 but both grew to 2,200 in 1920.

I know you've always told me what a shame it was that I never got to England when you were working there in 1906 and 1907. I certainly can't argue with that! But I also can't resist pointing out that you missed something interesting that was happening back here during those years – the extension of the trolley line to Ben Avon and Emsworth.

Although an extension of less than two miles it required three large bridges and a tremendous amount of earth-moving to create a flat roadbed between the bridges!



Original Emsworth 13 trolley.

When you've come down here for a visit, we've always walked the carline, but most of my other family visitors have preferred to see the local sights by trolley. Have I ever told you about the visit by Uncle Ralph and Aunt Ethel in May of 1913? We boarded the trolley

here in Bellevue and rode all the way to the Emsworth Loop.

Just as we neared the Emsworth borough line, Aunt Ethel spotted the big Presbyterian church on the left, and she commented on how clean the exterior masonry was. I explained to her that the church had just been built, and that Ben Avon also had two other new churches, lots of new homes and a new high school on the way. She was really impressed by the impact of the trolley line on that small community.

A few moments later, we passed the big car barn on the right, just before the Emsworth bridge. As you can imagine, that really appealed to Uncle Ralph! He could never pass a workshop without wanting to take a look inside! After that, it was on across the bridge and along Center Avenue to the end of the line at Hazelwood.

Uncle Ralph was disappointed that we couldn't stop at the car barn, but while we were waiting to begin our return trip, I came up with something that appealed to him. I explained to him how the street name of the carline changed from one borough to the next. Starting in Emsworth as Center Avenue the name changes to Church, to Division, to California, to Lincoln, and ends up in Allegheny City as California again! Drat, I mean it ends in Pittsburgh as California. It's been more than 15 years since Allegheny was annexed, but I still am not comfortable with the change.

His favorite, of course, was Division Street, that very short stretch near the Avalon Loop where the Avalon – Ben Avon borough line runs down the middle of the street! Aunt Ethel wrote to me a few days later, and she mentioned how Uncle Ralph had enjoyed telling his friends about these people down in

Pittsburgh who couldn't agree on the name of a street!

Moving the High Bridge

Here we are, in sight of the bridge. Look at all the people! Does it remind you of a certain day in July 1919? July 11th, it was. I felt really glad that you were able to come down here for that. And here's the house where my old friend Archie invited us to join him on his porch, drink some lemonade, and watch the convoy roll past.

Wasn't that a sight? One after another, military vehicles of every kind, rolling across the Jack's Run Bridge and along the main street of this little borough, in a convoy two miles long! On their way from Washington to San Francisco, in order to find out for themselves whether our roads were good enough to make a cross-country convoy practical.

Of course, the answer was NO! What a struggle they had, particularly out west! They left Washington on July 7th, and didn't arrive in San Francisco until September 6th!

That was certainly a red-letter day in the history of Bellevue. Those military vehicles – and some of them looked really heavy – were rolling along at a fairly good pace when they came through here. You'll remember that Archie was concerned about all the heavy traffic on what was originally a bridge for trolleys and pedestrians. It's a shame that he died last year, because he would have been really interested in what is being done to the bridge today.

Of course, Archie wasn't the only person concerned about this bridge. Allegheny County took over the bridge from the trolley company in 1917, and

after that it was just a matter of time before a new bridge would be built.

Back in the spring, the county announced plans to build a replacement bridge – a concrete arch structure. The old bridge would be demolished, and we would lose our trolley connection for at least a year! A temporary pedestrian bridge would be built across the ravine. We would have two options: ride the trolley from Bellevue to West View and into town from there, or walk across the foot bridge and catch the California Avenue trolley at the far end. I could have lived with that second option, but it would have been difficult for many people.

As you can imagine, the discussion on this subject got pretty lively! It was a great relief when the powers that be came up with a new approach. They would move the old bridge to make room for building the new one, shifting it to a position 75 feet closer to the Ohio River, and then reconnect it to the tracks at each end, and maintain our trolley service while the new concrete bridge was being constructed.

We are really fortunate, here in Pittsburgh, to have a firm like Eichleay that can take on a job of this sort. Last year, they handled a project at Second and Wood, just a couple of blocks from Weldin's. The city had decided to widen Second Avenue, to turn it into the Boulevard of the Allies, but the Woodwell Building was in the way. That's a brick building eight stories tall. The Eichleay crew lifted the building a foot in the air, and moved it 40 feet – while everyone in the building just continued with their work!

After seeing something like that, I wasn't surprised when they announced

that we would be free to walk across the bridge while they were moving it!

Before we walk across, let's take a look at what they've done on this edge of the ravine. Eichleay began preparing for the move on October 25th – exactly one month ago – and I've been one of their most faithful sidewalk superintendents. Several times a week I've been getting off the trolley on the Pittsburgh side and walking the rest of the way home, in order to see the progress they've made.

I know a bit about how this bridge was built – both from viewing it during the summer of 1893 and from reading about it. The bridge is 740 feet long, and up to 152 feet high. No wonder we call it the High Bridge! Its construction was written up in *American Engineer and Railroad Journal*. I've shown you that article, with its picture of the bridge when it was halfway across the ravine.

With that information in the back of my mind, it was fascinating to watch Eichleay constructing new concrete pier supports 75 feet down the valley from the original ones, and installing the rails on which they will move the bridge from the old piers to the new.

From the new sidewalk and trolley tracks, you can tell where the bridge is going to end up. There was a diagram in the paper yesterday. The move will take at least twelve hours, but by tomorrow morning, trolleys and other vehicles will once again be moving across this bridge – an interruption of one day, instead of one year!

In the meantime, let's go for a stroll on a moving bridge!

Notes and Resources

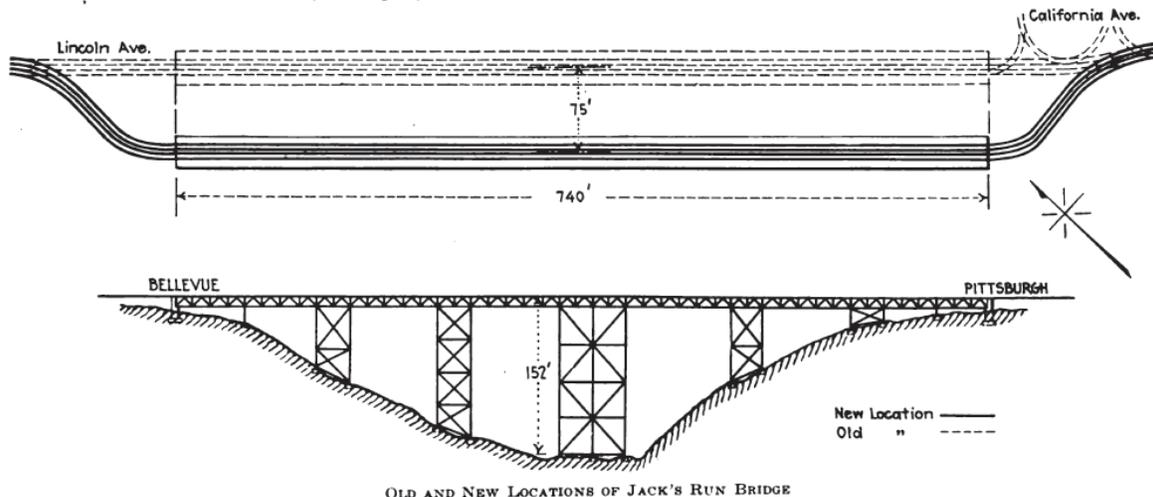
BAAHA Links #10: *This article is the tenth in a series spotlighting websites which focus on*

local history, and thus might be interesting to readers of this newsletter.

In the article, all the characters are fictitious, but the significant events – extension of the trolley line, construction of the bridges, moving of the Woodwell Building and the Jack’s Run Bridge, and passage of the transcontinental military convoy through Bellevue, Avalon, Ben Avon, Emsworth, Kilbuck, Glenfield and on west – took place as described.

Construction of the Jack’s Run Bridge was described in an illustrated article from 1893 in the *American Engineer and Railroad Journal*. Search on the name of the journal and the name of the bridge to read the article online, or download the bound volume that contains it as a very large PDF file.

You can find half a dozen photographs of the



OLD AND NEW LOCATIONS OF JACK'S RUN BRIDGE

original bridge (and a number of unrelated images) by going to the Images section of the Historic Pittsburgh website and typing “Jack’s Run” into the search field. (<http://digital.library.pitt.edu/images/pittsburgh/>)

The diagram above is from a 1922 article in *The Street Railway Journal* that described the moving of the bridge. As above, search on the name of the journal and the name of the bridge to read the article online, or download the bound volume that contains it as a very large PDF file.

According to that article, the moving of the bridge began at 7:30 a.m. on November 25, 1922, and concluded at 10 p.m. Trolley service and other vehicular traffic resumed the next day. This one-day interruption of light-rail transit service contrasts with the much longer interruptions in transit service – measured in years – that the North Boroughs experienced when

bridges along the “carline” were replaced in the Sixties, Seventies, and Nineties!

In 1922 Ohio River Boulevard was not available as an alternate route for “carline” traffic. Constructed in the late 1920s the section of the Boulevard between Manchester and Emsworth was completed in 1931.

Construction of the current Jack’s Run bridge, a concrete arch structure that replaced the original steel trolley bridge, was completed in 1924. Once it opened, the original bridge was removed. The monumental *Bridges and Tunnels of Allegheny County* website created by Bruce Cridlebaugh contains an excellent page about the current bridge. (http://pghbridges.com/pittsburghW/0580-4482/californiaav_jacksrun.htm)

We will have a bit more to say about the

1919 transcontinental military convoy in a future article, but if you would like to read more about it right now, pick up the new book by Simon Winchester, *The Men Who United the States*. It contains a chapter about the convoy.

About ten years ago, a British author named Pete Davies made a cross-country drive along the convoy’s original route, and then wrote a book titled *American Road: The Story of An Epic Transcontinental Journey at the Dawn of the Motor Age* (2002). The book is available through Carnegie Library.

The military convoy included several observers who were assigned to report on road conditions and the performance of the various vehicles. One of them was a young officer named Dwight D. Eisenhower. At the website of his presidential library you can read some fascinating documents related to the convoy, including the

reports Eisenhower submitted and the typewritten version of the daily log he kept. (http://eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/1919_convoy.html),

By the time they moved the Jack's Run Bridge in 1922, the John Eichleay, Jr., Company had been moving buildings (and other structures) for almost 50 years. The company still exists, but it has evolved into a general engineering firm based in California. At the company's website, there is a Timeline page) with photographs and brief descriptions of some remarkable projects, including the moving of the Woodwell Building and the Jack's Run Bridge. (<http://www.eichleay.com/timeline>)

John W. Eichleay, Jr., a descendant of the founders of the company, wrote an illustrated history of the firm titled *The House Movers*, and self-published it in 2010. Carnegie Library has one circulating copy of this book, which contains some excellent photographs of the equipment (and the manpower) required to move a structure like the Woodwell Building.

A detailed account of the moving of the Woodwell Building, written by the company's chief engineer, appeared in *Engineering News-Record* shortly after that project was completed. Search on "Eichleay" and "Woodwell" and the name of the journal to read the article online, or download the bound volume that contains it.

According to the article, the project required 1000 20-ton jacks, operated with extreme precision by a crew of 50 men. While the building moved horizontally at a rate of three feet per hour, Woodwell employees carried on with their normal office duties. Elevators ran as normal, and steam heat, electricity, water, sewer, and telephone services were maintained.

Many readers of this newsletter will recall St. Nicholas Church on East Ohio Street, which was recently demolished after a prolonged controversy. In the spring of 1921, while one Eichleay crew was moving the Woodwell Building to permit the widening of Second Avenue, a second Eichleay team was moving St. Nicholas Church and its parish house to accommodate the widening of East Ohio Street from two lanes to four.

As described in a feature on the website of Carnegie Library, the characteristics of the buildings made this project particularly challenging, and the work lasted from around Easter until after Labor Day. The buildings were

lifted more than eight feet in the air, and then moved twenty feet back from the street. Needless to say, weddings and funerals and Sunday services continued throughout the project! (http://www.clpgh.org/exhibit/neighborhoods/south/south_n701.html),



A "modern" trolley car, in this case an Avalon 14 at its loop, near the end of service in 1966.

BAAHA on the Internet

You may have noticed a change in URL that links to our website. A little different format but the same material is available. We hope to add an index of prior newsletter articles and make other improvements.

Let us know your suggestions for improving our online presence. Our email address remains the same: baaha@benavon.org.

Board Membership

As we prepare to start a new year (fiscal 2015) in July we do so without Jean Henderson and Darlene Phillips. In both cases they leave the board after years of supporting BAAHA's growth with their time and talents. For the immediate future they will continue to be available for us to ask for even more help on specific projects.

At our board meetings we will miss their insightful thoughts delivered in fellowship and with good humor. Our challenge is to find new blood to compensate. Board members need to have a commitment to our mission to collect, preserve and make available to the public items from which others may understand local history.

Memorial Day

As is usual, we will open the Dickson Log House following the Memorial Day service until 1:30 pm. Bring a neighbor and stop by!

Ben Avon Area Historical Association
 300 Camp Horne Road
 Pittsburgh, PA 15202



ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Renewing Members – THANK YOU!

Ben Avon Heights Centennial Committee	
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We cover all five Avonworth municipalities: Ohio and Kilbuck Townships and the Boroughs of Ben Avon, Emsworth and Ben Avon Heights.

We ask all who share a passion for history, a reverence for the past, and an interest in preserving our common heritage for future generations to join as a contributor to BAAHA.