



# The PLS GAZETTE

**A Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Live Steamers, Inc.**

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## The Wheel Count

Dear PLS Member,

According to the calendar, spring is just around the corner and the operating season of 2023 is about to begin! As we look forward in anticipation for another operation season, I want to remind our members of a few issues and bring to the forefront for discussion a topic to consider.

**Clubhouse update.** We are taking a pause in any further contractor work in the clubhouse until those member participation items are completed. This includes painting, trim work window repair, door casing, installation of a sink in the clubhouse and other items needed prior to our spring meet in May. Once this detail work is completed, I will encourage the Board to finish the kitchen, finish the floor and perhaps obtain additional accessories such as a soda machine that has long been on the wish list. Other outside maintenance work needs are also now accumulating.

Please note that we have tentatively slated **April 15th and 22nd** as cleanup days and opening of the property in anticipation of the **Boiler Testing for April 23**. Boiler witnesses are needed.

I am pleased to announce we have successfully completed our election process and welcome to the board, longtime member, Jim Salmons as well as a new member to the board Steve Mallon. I am also pleased that we have passed the acceptance of updated leases so that we may better manage ourselves this primary benefit for maintaining the regular membership status within our organization.

As I enter my second year as PLS president, I challenge the membership to contemplate our future forward. I ask that you review our mission statement from our By-Laws, and ask yourself two simple questions –

### **ARE WE A CLUB or ARE WE A HOBBY?**

The Oxford definition of club is “an association or organization dedicated to a particular interest or activity”.  
If we are a club, then let’s work harder at finding like-minded individuals who are going to be socially minded, and get together on a social bases to run trains.

Our mission statement however has clear language about “construction and maintenance” of a railroad. If we are a hobby, then let us become involved with the broader, “Live Steam” hobby nationwide. Given the emerging need for wood tie replacement over the 7.25-inch track, a tie replacement (with maintenance free plastic ties?). I offer this:

**I propose that the membership consider re-gauging the entire 7.25-inch track to 7.5-inch gauge.**

This notion is currently under discussion at two 7.25 clubs that I know of. If we replace track panels with new plastic ties, a proven standard at other clubs nationwide due to less required maintenance, we can use this project as a once in a generation opportunity to join the hobby nationwide. The forecast is that with membership participation – and this is a challenge - re-gauging the entire 7.25-inch track can be completed in one calendar year. This also means that all rolling stock and motor power would have to be regauged to 7.5 inch.

As many of you know, I have traveled for years to many 7.5-inch clubs throughout the country and know that we as a “club” are missing out on the “hobby” from learning and enjoying other tracks and other ways of having fun.

Re-gauging to 7.5 inch would allow us to enter into the larger portion of a hobby such as members attending and us hosting meets where we can invite many new Live Steamers to visit our track who have never visited before. Let’s face it – the participation from 7.25 organizations have all but disappeared.

### **Pros**

- Inviting and participating in the larger 7.5-inch segment of the hobby/travel to other clubs nationwide
- Becoming less alienated within the hobby
- Increasing the market value of a gauge standard when selling our equipment
- Increasing the options to purchase new and used equipment
- A new building project as our mission statement requires
- Replacement of track panels containing wood ties with low maintenance plastic tie material

### **Cons**

- Regauging of equipment
- More work projects
- Becoming more alienated within the hobby

**Let us have this discussion,**

Patrick J. Murphy, President  
Pennsylvania Live Steamers

## PLS Election Results

Annual elections were held at the regular membership meeting on Saturday, March 18, 2023. Pat Murphy, Mark Cahill and Bob Morris, running unopposed, were elected as President, Secretary and Treasurer respectively. The following members were elected to the Board of Directors: Pete Brown (incumbent); Paul Rice (incumbent), Steve Mallon; Jim Salmons. Board member Paul Miller will be entering the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of his 2-year term. In order to correct the Board of Directors imbalance created when President Murphy vacated his Board seat to become President in 2022, 4 Board members were elected this year instead of the normal 3 members. Additionally, Board member Ross Magee agreed to extend his term an additional year. Newly elected Board member Jim Salmons agreed to a 1-year term instead of the normal 2-year term. In 2024, the 3 Board seats to be contested will be Paul Miller, Ross Magee and Jim Salmons. In 2024, Board members Brown, Rice and Mallon will be entering their 2<sup>nd</sup> year of their 2-year terms. Congratulations and best wishes to those elected.

## Storage Track Payments are Due

To regular members who have storage tracks at PLS: your annual fees were due as of April 1. If you have not already paid, please see Bob Morris with your payment or send to PLS c/o the Treasurer.



## PLS Upcoming Events 2023

Saturday, April 15	Board of Directors Meeting - 9:30 AM <b>Spring Clean Up in AM</b> Membership Meeting - 12:30 PM Afternoon/Evening Run (See Note)*
Saturday, April 22	<b>Spring Clean Up in AM (Part 2)</b>
Sunday, April 23	Run Day - Members & Guests <b>Boiler Testing</b> (Rain Date April 30)
Saturday, May 20	Board of Directors Meeting - 9:30 AM Membership Meeting - 12:30 AM
Friday, May 26	<b>Spring Meet - Members &amp; Guests</b>
Saturday, May 27	<b>Spring Meet - Members &amp; Guests</b>
Sunday, May 28	<b>Spring Meet - Members &amp; Guests</b>
Saturday, June 3	<b>Perkiomen Community Day</b> Run Day - Township Residents

**\*Note:** Rides may not be available at afternoon/evening run days following membership meetings due to possible limited participation by equipment owners. All members and their guests are welcome to attend with the understanding that rides are not guaranteed at these events.

## Donation Acknowledgements

PLS wishes to thank the following members for donations received during February and March: Dave Taylor, Jared Schoenly, James Stapleton, Bill Shields, Rose Ann Wagner, Barry Shapin, Ken Chermak, Michael Tilger, William Peacock, Terry Weinstein, Pat Murphy, Henry Blanco White, Rick Stoughton, Ross Magee, Jim Miller, John Caldwell, and Paul Miller.

## Club Membership News

PLS welcomes new Probationary members Brian Runge and Charles Kadyk.

## Membership Gauge

As of March 31, 2023 PLS has:

- 102 Regular Members**
- 119 Associate Members**
- 4 Honorary Members**

## Pennsylvania Live Steamers, Inc.

<b>President</b>	Pat Murphy	President@palivesteamers.org
<b>Secretary</b>	Mark Cahill	mark.cahill@verizon.net
<b>Treasurer</b>	Robert Morris	Treasurer@palivesteamers.org
<b>Gazette Editor</b>	Lawrence Moss	LarryMoss@outlook.com

### Board of Directors

Steve Mallon, mallonmusic@gmail.com - Term Expires 3/25	Paul Rice, ricepaul@verizon.net - Term Expires 3/25
Ross Magee, mrrmagww@gmail.com - Term Expires 3/24	Peter Brown, peteprivate@yahoo.com - Term Expires 3/25
Paul Miller, pava77@comcast.net - Term Expires 3/24	Jim Salmons, jjshay6@gmail.com - Term Expires 3/24

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# Who was this Fellow, Bob Thomas?

A Tribute to Longtime PLS Member and Influencer, Robert G. Thomas Part 2

by Bill Shields

Part 2 begins with further comments on Bob Thomas' inaugural running of the B&O Class B-18 4-6-0 No. 2024.

His builder's notes clearly state that it was a 'freight hauling' inauguration -> he was NOT going to haul passengers. Passenger hauling was scheduled for the following month: once he was confident of the necessary operating procedure with freight. There was NO WAY that Bob would put a reasonably un-tested loco out on the track with passengers and suffer possible embarrassment.

The 32' diameter portable track (which was the track shown in the photo taken in his father's back yard) was going to be assembled, used for the afternoon, then disassembled on the same day. It almost sounds like Gauge 1 today. My how things go full circle.

Others with 2.5" gauge equipment were encouraged to bring their locos to run or display.

Shortly after having the B18 in operation, Bob became semi-inactive at PLS. This was due to his daily rail commute to NYC for his job with ABC, which did not get him home until 8 PM in the evenings and included frequent trips to Japan.

During this time, he became a regular contributor to Model Engineer magazine and the Newsletter of the 2.5" Gauge Association. Several of these articles have been previously shared with the PLS Gazette, including the series on 'Management of Small Live Steam Locomotives'.

Bob was always happy to assist novice live steamers with learning to operate their locos. The FIRST thing he would usually do is provide them with a copy of this above-mentioned article.

- Precarious was the student who did not read the missive, if provided.
- Even greater was the woe of one

who received, read, THEN TOTALLY IGNORED what Bob had written! (remember reference to 17/32" vs. 1/2" scale and a super clean shop?).

Around the year 2000, Bob brought the B18 (numbered 2024) out to run at PLS. It was the first time that many of us had ever seen a 2.5" gauge steamer in operation. Everyone was significantly impressed at the confidence and speed displayed as Bob performed his 'ground flying' expertise.

Jim Stuart and I quickly removed our 'Tom Thumb' from the track since Bob was going around the loop 2-3 times faster than we were. We were intimidated by a small loco going like greased lightning, being fired by an 'old guy lying on his stomach facing head-first toward the tender'. It quickly became obvious that the B18 with Bob at the throttle had 2 speeds - > standing at the station and throttle wide open with speed controlled by the cut-off.

The expression 'side rods were a blur' aptly described what we were witnessing. Later in the day, after he had finished running, Bob asked if we could help him get the 2024 and the riding car back into the trunk of his Buick because 'he was a bit tired since he had a kidney removed the previous week and did not want to overdo it'.

I remember thinking 'tough old dude.... I wonder if he could go faster on two kidneys'...?

Soon after, a long-term personal interaction with Bob came about involving a replacement boiler for Nellie (a loco which his father had completed in 1966). Bob had recently sold Nellie to Bob Blackson and unfortunately, Nellie immediately failed the annual hydrotest. Upon reviewing the existing boiler's design, it was apparent that some minor changes would be warranted.

Since a slightly different flue and super-

heater configuration (to Bob's specifications) was to be used in the new boiler, I felt it proper to get his ideas regarding Nellie's operation. Bob had been running Nellie with the original boiler on the PLS track for many years.

Be careful what you wish for! Bob readily supplied very explicit instructions regarding:

- How many scoops of what coal to put in the firebox?
- Where to set the blower when at the station.
- Minimum steam pressure before leaving the station.
- Water level before starting out on a loop (minimum and maximum since too much water resulted in a 'stack bath').
- Reversing gear setting – never just shove it into the corner and forget it! Correct Nellie operation required more motion of the reversing gear (cut-off) than throttle.

Each notable segment of the journey around the PLS track (by mile marker) was clearly documented with 'how many turns to back off or advance the cut-off' or 'where to set the water bypass' so that you would be sure to keep up steam pressure, minimize water consumption and attain optimal performance.

All of this was clearly documented in his *Model Engineer* article: "Nellie – An Innovative Live Steam Locomotive" -> hadn't I read it? (NO -> had not -> was it necessary to read the article to build a boiler?)

After he was sure that I had finally read (and digested) the article about Nellie as well as his guide to operating live steam locos, I was consistently and persistently questioned (to put it mildly) about settings of throttle and cut-off and pressure and how it may now be necessary to change the blast pipe size and position because of the difference in boiler construction. All



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this information was to ensure that Nellie was set up and properly (efficiently) operated on the PLS track. Whew!

Bob Blackson and I just wanted to get around the track without running out of steam.

Silly us, thinking that life could be so simple!

Meanwhile, back on Twin Silo Drive (Bob and Phyllis' retirement home), while all this remote Nellie operational support was going on, he was finishing a 1" electric loco and what I remember as a Gauge 1 steamer -> all on the workbench next to his HAM radio equipment.

In case any of you are interested - I never saw an errant chip or piece of scrap metal laying around. Heaven forbids that a metal chip would get into the HAM radio transceiver.

As Bob moved along in his retirement, he realized that continued steaming would be difficult due to health concerns. He soon finished building the all-electric 1" loco which he campaigned at the PLS track for a few years before he decided that it was no longer safe for him to be out on or getting to / from the track.

Shortly thereafter, he sold both the electric loco and the unfinished Gauge 1 steamer as well as all of his shop equipment.

Three years ago, Bob decided that he wanted his B18 to have a new home with someone who would get it back out on the track at PLS. He did not want 2024 to become a 'shelf ornament' or end up unappreciated in the bottom of a dumpster.

As a result, I am privileged to be the current caretaker of this beauty, along with the voluminous detailed documentation regarding its design, construction, painting, and testing.

During the transfer of 2024 from Bob's apartment to my vehicle, he was **very careful** to warn me about taking care to 'clear the track of every type of debris, since the cow catcher (pilot) has only 3/32" clearance and is easily bent in a derail. Oh...and if you do damage it, here is a quart can of paint left-over from 1979. Instructions on

mixing and applying are in the builder's binder.'

OK....enough said. I understood that I needed to be careful. Being the pragmatic engineer that I am and not wanting to open a 40 year old can of paint, the first thing that I did **before** running 2024 was to remove the 'cow catcher' and put it in a safe place so that it would not be damaged. No cow catcher, ergo no possible damage or need to repaint.

A few months later, I was very proud of the video / pictures taken of Britany Grimm successfully running 2024 around the ground level PLS track for its first outing in maybe 10 years. While still at PLS, I immediately forwarded the photos and video to Bob.

If you have been following this thread (or if you knew Bob) - you can guess what is coming next. Bob's return email **clearly established his desire for me to 'reinstall the cow catcher since the loco does not appear to be per prototype without it and should not be shown in public that way'. Period!**

You can also understand why all of the subsequent photos of 2024's operation have been carefully cropped so as to never again show the pilot beam!

To individuals of his generation, model railroading (Live Steaming) was not just a 'weekend away from the office' - > it was clearly an ingrained lifestyle.

As you look through the following pictures of Bob with his 'pride and joy' (7500 man-hours IS a LOT of work), you can easily understand why he was upset because some Philistine had the audacity to remove part of **his** loco and **dare** take it out in public 'partially assembled'.

Some of these photos were taken the last time he ran her at PLS during the 2006 Spring Meet. Some are builder's photos from 1978 / 1979. It was very rare to get a picture of 2024 without the cab roof. Bob even ran with the roof on.



One siding at the PLS Turntable still accommodates 2.5" gauge locos. Note this official photo with the cab roof and tender pump cover in place and facing side rods down!



The advantage of a small loco when it comes time to clean up.



While the loco is 2.5" gauge, the lay-down driver's car was 4.75" and had to be separated at the steaming bays since the 2.5" steaming bay does not accommodate 4.75" gauge. Even though the loco was in 'clean up mode' (no cab roof or pump cover), Bob made sure to roll her so that the side rods would appear down in the classic 'steam loco' photo position.

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The loco travels with a custom tool kit full of special wrenches that allow work to be performed on the smokebox, superheater and blast pipe.

Of special interest is an absolutely filthy length of 5/8" dowel with a 3/8" blind hole drilled into one end. Anyone have an idea regarding its use?

Ground Flying! (bottom photo credit to Bruce Saylor, PLS Gazette, 2011).

Note, the cab roof is in place even though it makes the throttle lever difficult to reach and water glass difficult to read. What many people did not know is that Bob built TWO cab roofs for the B18:

One 'proper prototype length' roof for display

One 'short' roof for operating that would allow him to see the water level and reach the throttle. This photo shows the 'short' roof.

Hopefully, the next time you see this 2.5" gauge loco out on the track, which will be without the cow catcher and most likely without the cab roof, please take a few minutes to walk over and appreciate the history of dedication required in its creation.

Bob's work depicts his insistence upon everything always being done correctly, and how that mind-set was carried though his entire life.

You can then begin to appreciate his lifetime of contributions to both PLS and the Live Steam hobby.

What's next?

I would like to recommend to all our club members that they take the opportunity to pick out one of the 'old guys', sit them down and talk about 'how it was in the old days', ask about the specific history of the steamer they (or their grandchild) may be operating.

You never know what you might learn... and none of us is going to be around forever.



My heartfelt thanks to Bob Blackson, John Caldwell, and Phyllis Thomas for assisting with gathering the information contained in this article.





# The Rebuilding Continues...

Since the destruction created by Tropical Storm Ida in September of 2021 when flood waters rose to historic proportions causing damage to every single building in the PLS complex, work has been progressing to not only restore what was lost but to also improve some of the old deficiencies.

In some ways the storm forced some much needed changes in layout. PLS will be a much better configured space in which to fully enjoy the hobby of live model railroading for years to come.



Photo by Pat Murphy

The meeting room above in Building #1 was totally covered with over 4 feet of flood water even though it is located on the high end of the property.

The refurbished room now boasts all new drywall on walls and ceiling. New electrical wiring plus lighting and HVAC system have been added along with new furniture and custom window molding.



Photo by Pete Brown

Jim Adams expertly repairs the wooden deck and ties at the turntable junction.

New plastic 2x4's ready to be cut were purchased to replace the old wooden ties as needed. Although more expensive, they will pay for themselves in reduced maintenance.

Photo by Pat Murphy







Mark Cahill, Club Secretary, does some edging near the rail yard.

The steaming bays surrounding the turntable received a fresh coat of paint after over a decade of neglect. The shiny new black paint really looks great.



Photos by Pat Murphy



## New PLS Hats



Available at the Sales Table at all Club sponsored PLS events

### Featuring

- Three color Embroidered logo
- Cotton/Polly Blend
- Velcro adjustment band
- One size fits most
- Limited Edition

**Only \$12.00**

## SPECIAL MESSAGES



## FOR MEMBERS

## Help needed for the Spring Meet

### “Many Hands Make Light Work”

Volunteers are needed for all food service meals at the Spring Meet.

If you are interested in helping serve food, please contact Gwen Forsythe at:

[jgforsythe123@gmail.com](mailto:jgforsythe123@gmail.com)

### Special Note

A Volunteer is also needed to organize the Pot Luck Dinner at the PLS Spring Meet.

# PLS Library

## Book of the Month



### Book Review

Experience 60 of the world’s greatest and most memorable train journeys, from classic long-distance trips, such as Canada’s Rocky Mountaineer and Darwin to Adelaide’s The Ghan, to little-known gems on regular commuting lines. Each profile features practical information and full color photos.

### For Information contact:

Joe Gotlewski, Librarian  
[joegotlewski@gmail.com](mailto:joegotlewski@gmail.com)





**The  
PLS GAZETTE**

P.O. Box 26202  
Collegeville, PA 19426-0202

**FIRST CLASS**

**2023  
Spring Meet Eats**

**Come Hungry** **It will be Yummy**

**PLS**

**Saturday Morning - May 27 - All you can eat Breakfast**  
**Saturday Lunch - May 27 - Hot Dog Bar, Sloppy Joe's, etc.**  
**Saturday Evening - May 27 - Pot Luck Dinner**  
**Sunday Morning - May 28 - Brunch and Lunch**