



The PLS GAZETTE

November–December 2011

A newsletter of the Pennsylvania Live Steamers, Inc.

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Along the Main Line

Today as I sit and gather thoughts for my editorial, I am reminded of the J. S. Bach choral prelude, “Das alte Jahr vergangen ist” (The old year is past). Recalling the fun filled days in the sun, I now can look forward to the winter projects awaiting in the basement as well as at the club, and eagerly await the excitement that the spring will bring.

At a most recent work session, members could be found raking and

picking up leaves around the property. Water has been shut off on the track and other winter preparations are all but completed. Several members of the track committee were at work realigning the 1.5" station and mainline track with relocation of turnouts and rebuilding of crossover diamonds at Beck tower (mm0). One diamond has already been rebuilt by Bruce Saylor while second diamond awaits redesign and reconstruction over the winter months. The mainline will now merge with the yard exiting down the left side of hill instead of the right and

rejoining before the tunnel entrance as it always has been. This realignment, along with a revised signal support, should alleviate station congestion, the potential of sideswipe between station exiting trains and the mainline, and provide improved signaling and right-of-way. Meanwhile, design work on the East Rahns project continues.

Another project now underway involves the rebuilding the of 1" track from the station to the tunnel. In addition of new ties along this section,

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Track Rebuilding Project Resumes After Run Season Ends

The rebuilding of the 4¾" track has resumed now that the running season is done until next year. After the October run day, a total of 180 feet of the 4¾" main track was removed from the east station switch to the brick tunnel under the multi-gauge track. This is the second phase of the Rahns station / yard rebuilding project. The photos show some of the members working on this track repair. At the same time the grade is being realigned to create a constant rate, or degree, of incline. This should reduce the percent of the grade somewhat and spread it out over a longer section of track. The photos show the status as of this writing on November 28. Some of the members involved are, Hank Riley, Jim Miller, Larry Moss, Ed Kabak, Jim Rich and Henry White (and a few other members whose names I can not recall today).

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PLS Workers set new track section in the cut leading to the brick tunnel.

Along the Main Line

(Continued from page 1)

regrading is being performed to flatten out the amount of “hump” that provides excitement or anxiety for those riders. The end result should provide a more gentle profile within this section.

New storage leases will be unveiled at the March meeting and should be in place after an April vote. The new leases have been carefully reworked by Robert Blackson, Ron Shupard, and Robert Freer (The three “R” committee). The end result is expected to be a fairer understanding between lesser and lessee and hopefully resolve many of the long standing concerns.

The calendar for 2012 is now complete and should be posted shortly.

A nominating committee consisting of Peter Brown and Jim Connelly has been established to provide nominees

for new board members and officers including a new President. Please consider running for the board and serve this most note while organization. After the holidays I look forward to Cabin Fever Expo in York and the new spring events.

Need a stocking stuffer? Consider the purchase of the Pennsylvania Live Steamer DVD and help the club at the same time— It's only \$20 and supplies are very limited, This 90 minute pro-

duction features the best of what our club is all about today— running trains and having fun.

In closing I want to wish each member of Pennsylvania Live Steamers a Merry Christmas and safe and healthy New Year.

See you at the track.

Pat Murphy, President, PLS

Library Report

PLS VIDEO: In case you missed it, the club arranged for High Driver Video Productions to make a professional DVD of activities at the Fall (2011) Meet.

We agreed to purchase at wholesale 50 commercially presented copies of this video for resale by the club at \$20.00 each. The videos are approximately 1½ hours long and show train running and other club activities in a seamless and integrated manner. This includes interviews with some famous PLS members summarizing some club history.

At this writing we have sold 39 of the 50 DVDs and are in the black. So we have 11 left and if you are interested they are going fast. Please remember that they are only available at the club during work hours on Wed and Sat mornings. See Walt Mensch (club phone number 610-454-0477).

Speaking of videos, we recently received a large number of train videos from the John Bortz family. There are over 80 videos in this lot which we shall convert to DVDs this winter. These will be added to the over 100 train videos that we already have in our lending collection (to go along with the over 800 train-related books in the library). Let's take a quick look

at the content of three of the Bortz videos with which you could soon while away those dark winter nights in front of the tube.

1. ‘**The Late Great Nickel Plate**’ This line's true name was “The New York, Chicago & St. Louis RR.” Controversy surrounds the origin of its nickname but one theory is because at the time of its creation nickel plating was expensive and used only on quality goods. If true, the Nickel Plate people were obviously doing something right to earn that nick name from its customers. This video features mostly steam including of course those famous

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Donation Acknowledgements

PLS wishes to acknowledge the following for their donations during October and November: Time Bandits Car Club, Mr. and Mrs. Michael T. Dombroski Jr and Raymond Khoudary, MD.

Club Membership News

PLS welcomes new Associate members Ross E. Rowland, Jr and Adam Madlinger. Larry Moss is now a probationary Regular member. Also, the Board of Directors recently voted John Bortz, Sr into Honorary membership.

Membership Gauge

As of November 30, PLS has:

101 Regular Members
294 Associate Members
9 Honorary Members

Track Rebuilding Project

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Most of the dirty work is done leaving only the removal of the loosened dirt, thanks to Hank's rototiller, replacing the fabric in the trench and then the rest of the track as it is rebuilt. This was accomplished because of the great weather we've had so far this fall. 🍁

— Ron Shupard

Right: Track is replaced in the cut.

Below: Ron Shupard starts removing the old stone.



J. Harold Geissel

By Bob Thomas

Part 1 – Illustrious railroad modeler

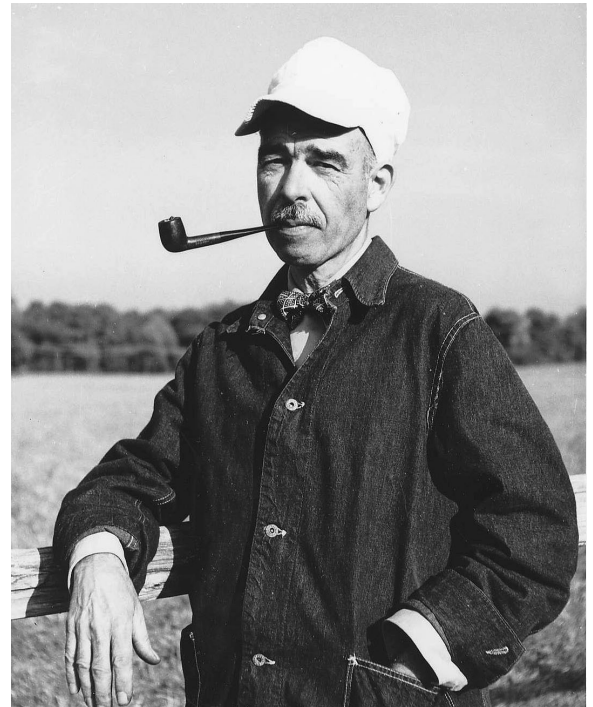
“A long time ago in a world far, far away” (to paraphrase the dramatic opening roll-up to *Star Wars*), PLS members could easily obtain complete sets of blue prints for almost any U.S. locomotive of interest. Perhaps it was that availability, supplementing the personal drive for accomplishment that existed then, that led to live steam locomotives under construction by almost every member of PLS in our early years. A full set of prints often could be obtained for a locomotive of choice simply upon request to a railroad or manufacturer, but there also was a comprehensive resource right within the club itself for prints of almost any well-known engine, rolling stock (especially cabin cars, to use PRR terminology), and wayside buildings. That source was J. Harold Geissel, also known as “Gike,” who had been making his famous three-view drawings since 1936 of all things railroad to illustrate *Model Railroader* articles, particularly the magazine’s extraordinary locomotive center-folds. Harold had accumulated a huge file of prints and photographs that he generously made available for loan to PLS members.

Harold Geissel was born in 1893 so he had already lived a good part of his rich life by the time we became acquainted in 1946, one month after he and five other men had met at Joe Wilson’s lawn mower repair shop in Malvern to found the Pennsylvania Live Steamers. His appreciation for trains, especially branch lines, began during childhood vacations with relatives in Lewisburg, where visits to the local engine house there were so frequent the hostlers allowed to him

clean locomotives as high as he could reach. At his family’s home near the PRR Philadelphia-Washington mainline, Harold came into his element with daily opportunities to observe trains of the 1890s to early 1900s, etching that era in his mind.

After graduation from Central Manual Training High School in Philadelphia, Harold got a job as office boy at the Philadelphia architectural firm of Harbison, Hough, Livingston and Larson. When the First World War came along and construction work declined, he took a job for five years in Baldwin’s Tender Shop, where he must have paid attention because sixty years later he still could sketch from memory almost any tender imaginable, with rivet patterns and other details! He returned to the architectural firm’s drafting department after the war and began university studies in architecture. Although he did not complete a formal education in the field, Harold gained enough practical design experience to be admitted to the American Institute of Architects, and in 1941 he became a Registered Architect in Pennsylvania. During the five decades he rode the Paoli Local to work every morning he made friends with other regular commuters who were also railroad enthusiasts, among them Carl Layer (another PLS Founder), Ken Souser, who would become the club’s benevolent landlord, Jim Ziegler, and Frank Moore. What conversations they must have had!

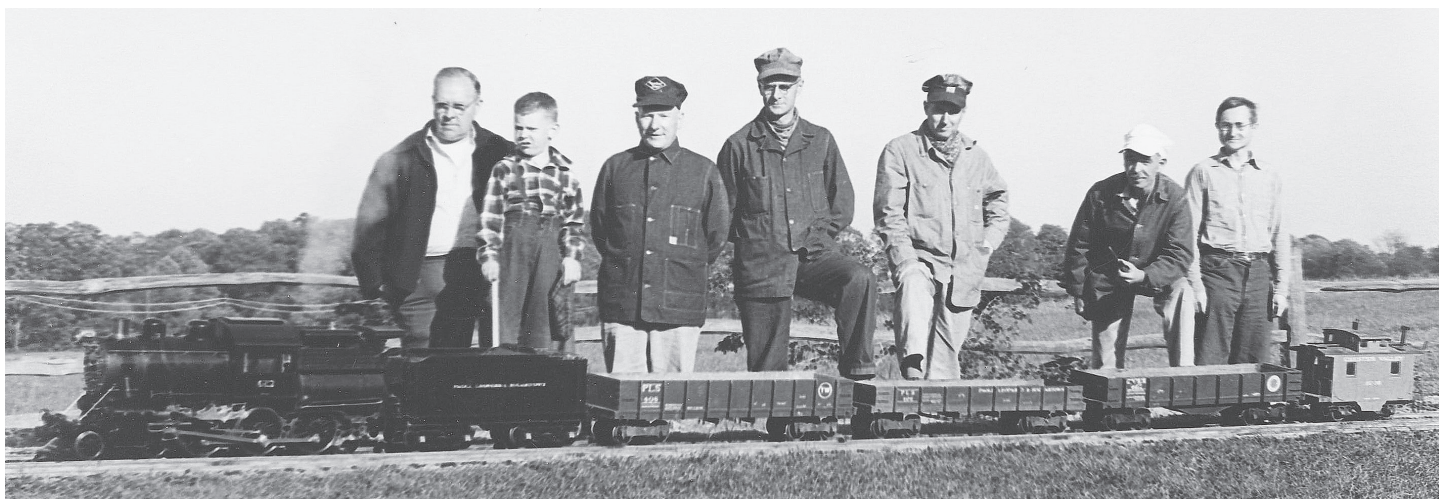
Harold’s serious modeling effort began in the mid-’thirties with construc-



Bob Thomas

tion of his Chester Valley RR Railroad¹, a $1\frac{7}{64}$ " super-scale imaginary 20-mile Reading branch line. Trackwork, buildings, scenery and rolling stock of the CV were exquisite — as realistic as anything seen today, and remember, he did it almost eighty years ago! By the time I knew him, Harold had laid a 2.5" gauge track along the driveway of his house. By then he had also built several $1\frac{7}{32}$ " scale freight cars, all to JHG standards of realism, including his superb hand-lettering. Harold preferred the term, “antiquing,” for his treatment of cars after they had been completed to convey the appearance of age. He accomplished that by brushing black paint all over a beautifully finished car. If he wanted to depict a car recently built but dirty, he rubbed off the paint immediately, leaving residue where cinders and grime would naturally accumulate. For an older look the black paint was allowed to dry a little bit before it was wiped off, creating an aura of many years’ service. The way Harold did his antiquing process

¹ Geissel, J. Harold. “Chester Valley Railroad,” *Model Railroader*, 8/39, 383-386.



Bob Thomas

Left to right: Visitor, author's nephew, George Thomas, Adrian Buyse, Henry Townsend, Harold Geissel, Frank Moore. Foreground: George's RDG L-7sb, a rake of JHG gondolas and his favorite cabin car, ca. 1951.

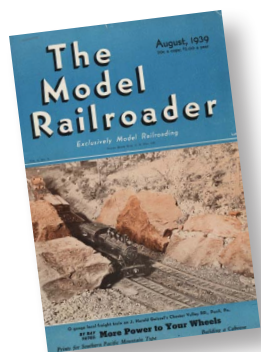
it produced a much more believable appearance of age than most modern attempts of so-called weathering which too often scream, "I own an airbrush."

Harold continued to build freight cars long after becoming involved with PLS, but in 1" scale. He cleverly displayed as many roads and private owners as possible by sometimes lettering one side of a car for one railroad, and the other side for a different road or owner. Despite his fondness and prolific output of freight cars, nothing in railroading matched Harold's passion for cabin cars. He built too many to account for, from humble 4-wheel crummies to modern eight-wheelers. In fact, his very first drawing for *MR* was a Western Maryland 4-wheeler.

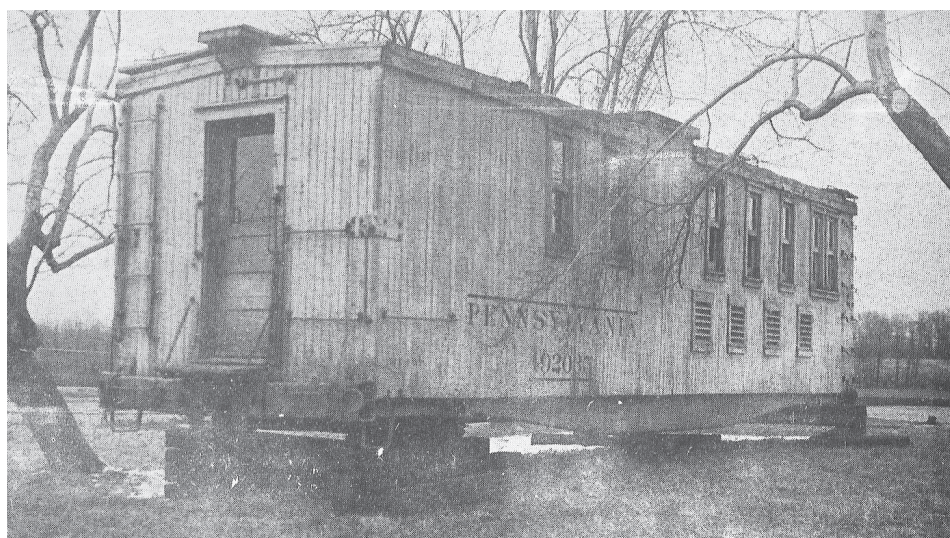
I tremble at the thought of what the eminent J. Harold Geissel would think today if he saw a 100-car freight drag pass with nothing more than a flashing light on the rear end!

What might well have been *the* high point in Harold's experience at PLS, occurred on blustery January afternoon in 1948 when a Scott Brothers truck, pulling a flatbed trailer, stopped on Buttonwood Road, adjacent to our track. Scott was the road hauling subsidiary of the Pennsylvania Railroad and was delivering decommissioned PRR Camp Car No. 492035 — minus trucks. Memory of the maneuvering is now dim, but Scott riggers managed to get the car body onto tie cribbing on the hillside beyond our track. To

some (especially Mrs. Souser!) that dilapidated, dull gray railroad castoff was an abomination. Others saw it as a potential meeting room and a place to store shovels and rakes. Harold looked well beyond that, for he was in love! From the afternoon the Camp Car was delivered, Harold took to it, researching its history, sweeping the floor, putting the remaining interior fixtures in order, replacing rotted window frames, painting here and there, and generally taking over responsibility for the car's welfare. The exterior was eventually painted dark green to make it as inconspicuous as possible, and the interior was modified to suit club needs. But make no mistake; that Camp Car belonged to Harold Geissel! 🚂



Harold's 17/64" scale Chester Valley Railroad made the front cover of *Model Railroader*. The PRR D-16sb emerging from a cut of hand-selected rock was built by Paul Egolf, a prominent Philadelphia O gauge craftsman and manufacturer of the 'thirties.



The PRR camp car shown after delivery in 1948. It could only get better, and Harold saw that it did.

15th Annual Turkey Trot

By Harry Quirk

Photographs by Chuck Bednarik and Scott McDonald, *Steam in the Garden Magazine*



The forecast for Black Friday was warm weather and clear skies, unlike past years, when it was either cold or rainy or both. After enough turkey, our group was anxious to get one last run in for the season. Normally we would get 6 or 7 runners, but this year we had 19 show from as far away as North Carolina, Maryland, Virginia, and New Jersey. Everyone attending had some track time. Brittany Grimm showed off her new Accucraft K-4 for the first time. It ran very well, right out of the box. Bryan Del Monte showed off his new Aristocraft 2-8-2, with a string of hoppers. Mike Moore ran a British 9F 2-10-0, a copy of the last steam locomotive built in the UK. Ryan Bednarik ran his coal-fired K-4, pulling 6 heavy weight Pullman coaches. We had two surprises — Carol Quirk supplied a tub of *free* blondies and we had a visit from our president, Pat Murphy.

We all have next year to look forward to, after a few indoor runs this winter on Mike Moore's portable track.

Above: Gauge 1 members pose for a group shot. **Below:** B&O saddletank pulls some Pennsy livery. **Bottom:** Mike Moore's new 2-8-2 with B&O custom features.





Clockwise from Top Left: The Quirk brothers by the track; **Mike Moore** guides his B&O 2-8-2; **Ryan Bednarik** with his coal-fired Pennsy Pacific; **Brittany Grimm** with her new Accucraft K-4.

Library Report

(Continued from page 2)

Berkshires like the one John Bortz Sr. has rendered so well in 1 ½ inch scale. But it also covers 0-8-0 switchers in the yards, Hudsons and some Alco PA diesels. The video is 50 minutes long and is in color. By the way we also have several books on the Nickel Plate amongst our holdings.

2. **'Hawk Mountain Memories'** This video is of the Reading in 1945 and then in 1955. As part of that coverage we ride a mixed consist traveling down the Perkiomen Branch of the Reading. If that sounds familiar, it should be because that track went right in front of the club on what is now the bike trail. The ride shows the scenery from Emmaus to Perkiomen Junction which is just north of the Schuylkill River. We see where the club will be (it's 1955)

and the station and some other old buildings at Rahns and at Collegeville. This disk also covers some Lehigh Valley, Lehigh and New England, and Central of New Jersey trains in the same time frame.

3. **'Cinders in the Summer'** This train video which was shot in 1991 and focuses heavily on restored engines covers four specific steam engines, two of which have a strong local presence. First, there is the popular Reading 2-8-4 engine number 2102 which I believe was involved in the Reading rambles. Second, we see footage of the New Hope and Ivyland 2-8-0 number 40 which has been used there extensively to haul rail fans and other tourists to the Upper Bucks tourist area. In addition there is film of the Nickel Plate number 765 and the Pere Marquette 2-8-4 number 1225. These are just three of our many videos in the PLS library. Why not take one out on your

next visit to PLS. They are free for a month to any PLS regular or associate member.

The club would like to thank the Bortz Family for their extensive donation of videos. We also thank Rita and John Bixler and Jeff Jacobsen for their donations of magazines and DVDs. As mentioned before in a previous gazette, we are trying to fill the gaps in some of our magazine collections. We cover magazines that deal with live steam, very large scale miniature trains, the machining hobby and magazines that limit coverage to full scale trains that run or ran in the middle Atlantic and northeastern US. We are not able to keep any of the general train modeling or prototype magazines like *Trains* or *Model Railroader* because of space limitations. 📖

— Lynn Hammond
(484-238-7335 cell)



The PLS GAZETTE

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FIRST CLASS



Bruce Saylor

Track is reworked in front of the Rahns station after the end of the running season. More to come next issue. The project is nearly complete.