

Steam—Cumberland's Heritage

Written by: **Dan Whetzel**

*B&O's KB-1A Class
Locomotive was a massive
2-6-6-4 built in 1937.*



*W*estern Maryland and Cumberland are favorite locations for railfans because a variety of trains may be photographed in picturesque and historical settings. Colorful boxcars, coal hoppers, and a host of modern CSX locomotives, such as GE 44-9 AC's and SD 70 MAC's, contrast with the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad's 1916 Baldwin steam engine as they glide through Cumberland's historic Narrows. Cumberland's rail heritage stretches back to the early days of the industry and its association with the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, America's first common rail carrier.

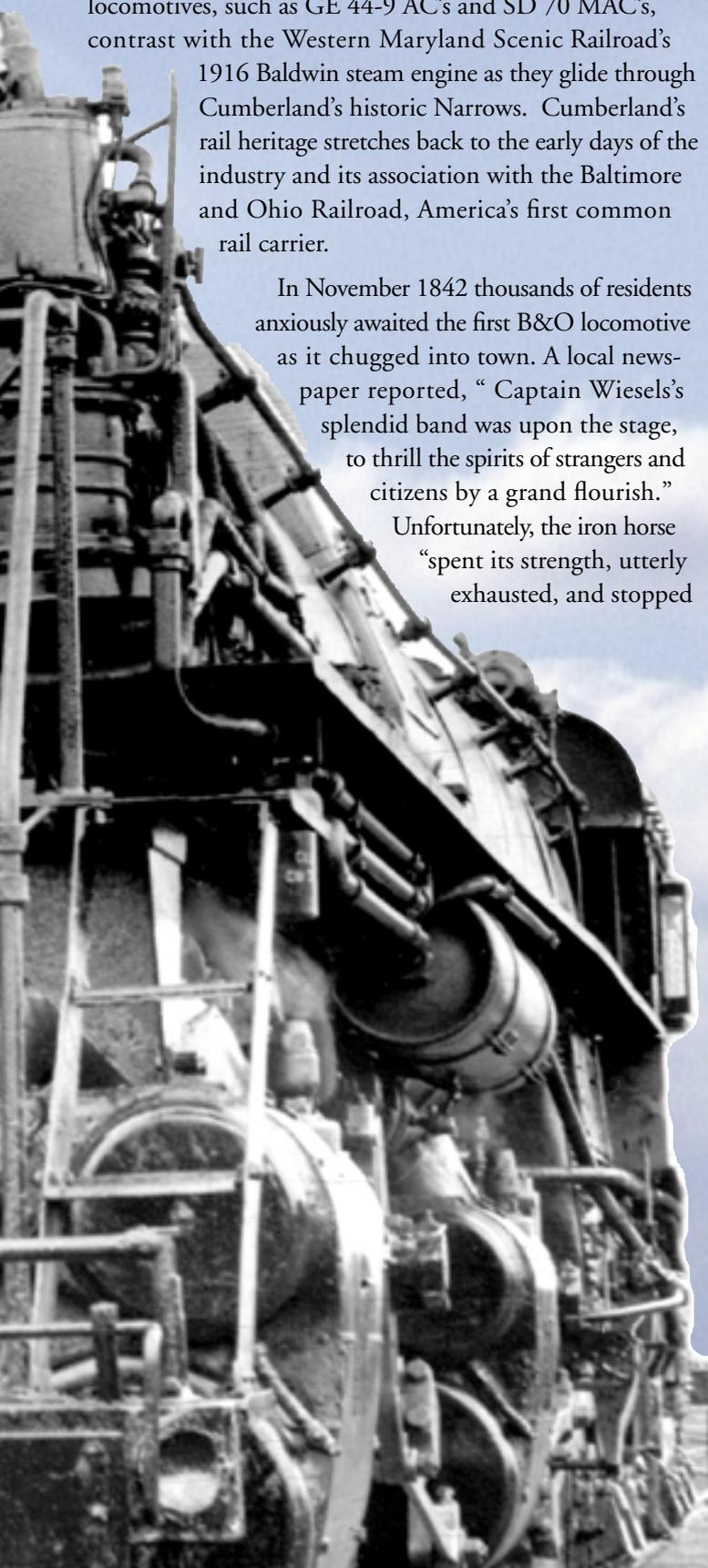
In November 1842 thousands of residents anxiously awaited the first B&O locomotive as it chugged into town. A local newspaper reported, "Captain Wiesels's splendid band was upon the stage, to thrill the spirits of strangers and citizens by a grand flourish."

Unfortunately, the iron horse "spent its strength, utterly exhausted, and stopped

short some twenty yards from the stage." Many curious onlookers fled in fear of the iron horse whose smoke, cinders, and noise were strangely different from horse-drawn wagons. The celebrated train's debut quickly became a routine event as railroad construction boomed throughout most of the late 19th century, stimulating economic expansion and population growth in Western Maryland. Cumberland's reputation as a railroad center became firmly established by the early 20th century, as related facilities developed to accommodate rail traffic and competing rail lines fought for their share of the profits. Rail service success resulted from abundant natural resources waiting to be tapped and carefully planned construction efforts that supported the industry by building infrastructure along the Potomac River and the streams of Western Maryland.

After arriving in Cumberland, a decision was made to extend the B&O line in a southwesterly direction toward Rawlings, Piedmont, and up the Seventeen Mile Grade to Oakland, Maryland with its terminus on the Ohio River at Wheeling, West Virginia. Resort facilities developed along the route at Deer Park and Mountain Lake Park. Wealthy visitors from metropolitan areas found the cool summer evenings in Western Maryland to be a pleasant alternative to the hot, humid surroundings of the eastern coastal plain. Every extension of the B&O line provided opportunities for entrepreneurs to capitalize on increased rail traffic and trade throughout the region. Guest services, wholesaling, retailing, and construction trades thrived because of economic activity generated by the B&O. Another major boost to trade and travel was accomplished in 1872 when the line to Pittsburgh, over Sand Patch Grade, was completed, thereby linking Cumberland with Chicago, Cleveland and Detroit. Expansion of the B&O helped related industries. One of the most prominent factories was the rolling mill, a sprawling thirty-acre site built on land provided by the city of Cumberland in 1867. Approximately one thousand highly paid wage earners turned out two thousand, five hundred tons of rails each month. Remnants of that facility remained until a few years ago when construction of the Queen City Center required its destruction.

Another prominent B&O facility in downtown Cumberland was a brick roundhouse, built during the 1840's and located along the mainline near the present day Value City shopping complex. A distinctive, windowed cupola dominated the skyline at the eastern section of town, making it a well-known landmark for six decades.





Above: The B&O repainted the Queen City Station for the final time in 1953. This photograph was taken after the facelift.

Left: B&O Train Number 9, led by #5076, is being helped with E-7's out of Cumberland, Maryland on September 5, 1949. William Price photo, Harry Stegmaier collection.

Increasing rail traffic necessitated abandoning the original roundhouse in favor of a new, expansive complex in South Cumberland. Completed in 1906, the larger roundhouse and repair shops bordered Virginia Avenue and stretched the length of East Offutt Street. At this facility, legendary steam engines received service by boilermakers, machinists, pipefitters, blacksmiths, and other skilled workers. The Cumberland Locomotive Shops not only performed routine maintenance on locomotives but completely rebuilt them as well. The shop eventually became a major locomotive facility on the Baltimore & Ohio line and kept the famous fleet of locomotives operational, repairing everything from small switchers to larger freight and passenger power units. Massive 2-8-8-0 Mallets, and giant 7600 series Articulateds spun on the giant turntable before being assigned to service stalls or road assignments. Following the demise of steam power, the shops were rebuilt and re-tooled in the late 1950's, becoming a major diesel maintenance facility.

Long time residents still recall the hissing, chugging, and clanging of iron horses that swirled smoke and cinders around the shops and nearby neighborhoods. A retired

railroader recalled, "Mother referred to my sooty legs and knees as 'Cumberland knees,' because I never seemed to get that dirty whenever I visited a friend somewhere else." CSX presently maintains an extensive rail yard, engine repair facilities, and a paint shop in sections of the original roundhouse, thereby maintaining Cumberland's railroading industry and tradition. Railfans can safely view the historic site and its current operation from nearby sidewalks or Industrial Boulevard (Maryland Route 51), and can watch CSX's parade of trains from a sidewalk between Baltimore Street and the Amtrak station in downtown Cumberland.

Local railroading heritage is also closely associated with the Queen City Hotel; a large Italianate style building that replaced a small station on Baltimore Street. Service as a station and office complex made it an unusual site, as B&O resort hotels were typically situated further from the tracks and in remote locations. The Queen City Hotel was never promoted by the railroad as a tourist destination, although it served as one in its dual role as a working station and luxury hotel. The station became important because Cumberland was a major junction point on the

B&O Railroad. From the city, train passengers heading westward could take either the old mainline track across West Virginia, or the more recently built line to Pittsburgh.

Construction of the Queen City Hotel began in 1871 with an initial price tag of \$200,000. The B&O certainly got its money's worth. Guests were offered a choice of one hundred fifty well appointed steam heated rooms, access to a four hundred seat dining room, convertible to a ball-room, and amenities associated with a first class hotel. The dining room was a very important feature in the days before railroad dining cars were in operation.

A gradual decline in rail passenger service led to the piecemeal closing of the hotel during the 1920's, as automobiles began to influence travel habits. Hotel facilities were closed completely following World War II, although a ticket office operated until February of 1971. Weather damage had taken its toll on the exterior surface by the 1950's and other major repairs were necessary. Several efforts were made to refurbish the aging structure. Painting and cleaning in 1953 provided a facelift but structural problems remained unaddressed by the railroad whose declining passenger service caused a lack of interest on the hotel's future. A fire in March 1969 resulted in an inspection of the building with local officials declaring it to be a fire and safety hazard. Subsequently, plans to abandon and raze the hotel were prepared by the railroad. By the fall of 1971, preservationists' efforts to save the historic hotel from a wrecking ball failed and demolition crews began work. Razing of the hotel proved to be a labor-intensive task and continued for several months. The Cumberland Post Office complex sits on the site today, near a small Amtrak station that serves trains Number 29 and Number 30, known as The Capitol Limited.

As the B&O rose to local and national prominence, other railroads sought

A Western Maryland Challenger clears the bridge over Route 40 in the Cumberland Narrows.



A westbound view from the B&O Queen City Station. Photograph mid-1960's.





*Jacob Daniels, Engineer (foreground) with the Class E 27 a, 2-8-0 Consolidation, built in Richmond, Virginia in 1906.
Photo courtesy N.T. Smith*

to complement or compete with the line. Short line railroads found a niche in the system by serving coal mines, timber operations, and other small businesses in remote areas that could connect with the B&O at Cumberland. The most important and long-lived of the local short line railroads was the Cumberland and Pennsylvania. Originally built by Maryland & New York Iron and Coal Company in 1844, it was first known as the Mt. Savage Railroad. Presidents Theodore and Franklin D. Roosevelt's ancestors were major stockholders in the business. The company operated a blast furnace and iron rolling mill at Mt. Savage, Maryland, an industrial boomtown of the mid 19th Century that also earned the distinction of manufacturing the first "U" shaped iron rail in the United States. Each rail weighted 42 pounds to the yard and resembled an inverted upper case "U" in appearance. For the technological achievement, the Mt. Savage Iron Works was awarded a silver medal from the prestigious Franklin Institute of Philadelphia.

Construction of the Mt. Savage Railroad was accomplished by entering the Narrows enroute to Cumberland, where the already established B&O offered connections to major markets. Financial setbacks caused the iron works to change ownership several times, until 1854, when the fourteen miles of track became part of the Cumberland and Pennsylvania Railroad.

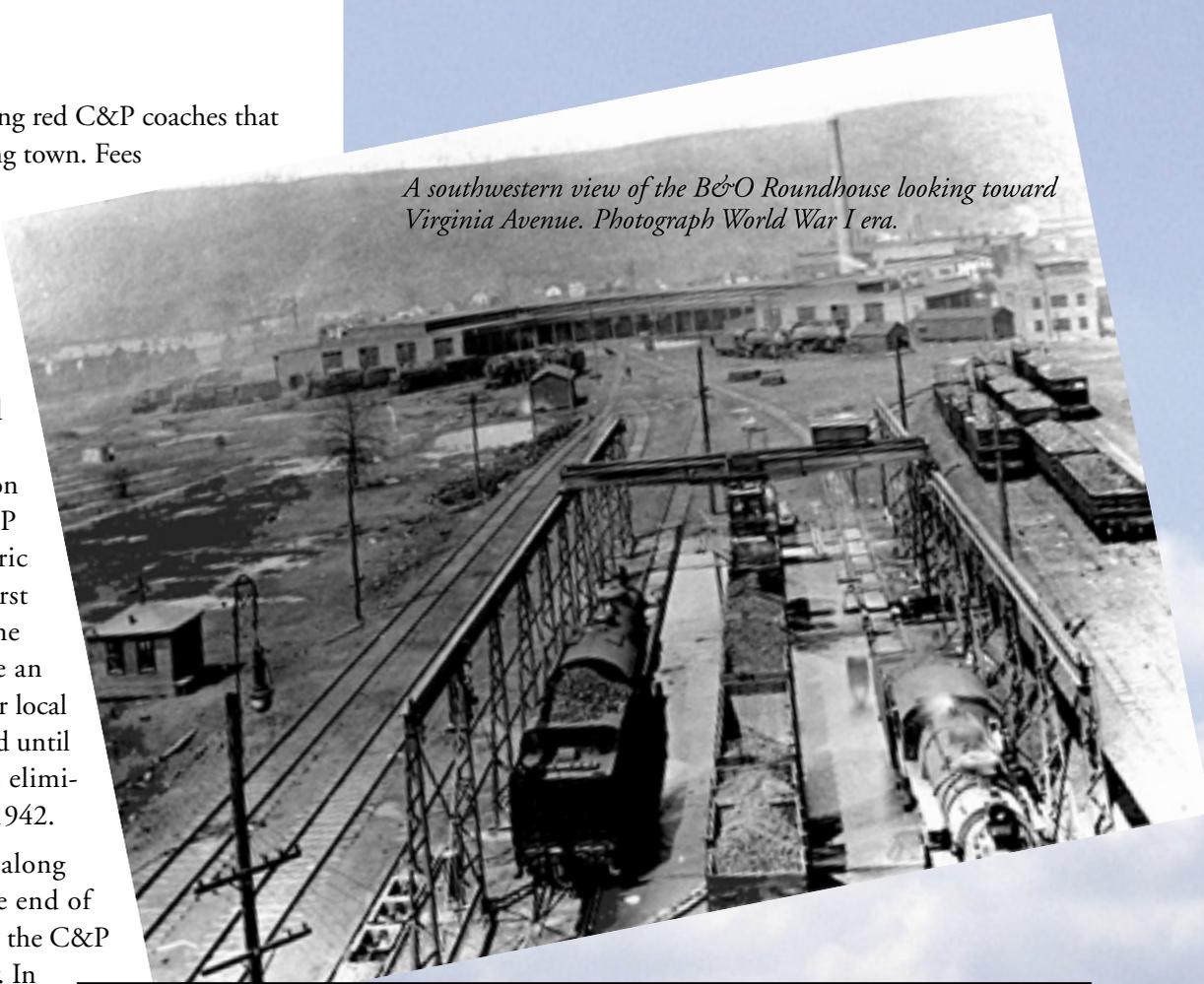
Demand for coal along George's Creek stimulated extension of C&P tracks. At its peak, the C&P boasted approximately thirty miles of mainline track and an additional seventy miles of siding and branch lines that ran from Cumberland to Mt. Savage, Frostburg, and down George's Creek to the railroad's terminus at Piedmont, West Virginia. Additionally, C&P acquired control of the Eckhart Branch Railroad that crossed Will's Creek and traveled through LaVale to coal mines at Eckhart and Hoffman. Regular passenger service along the route provided inexpensive transportation services during a time when travel about the region proved to be difficult. Long time

residents recall boarding red C&P coaches that stopped at each mining town. Fees could be as little as five cents for short runs. Special trains ran for coal miners and excursions were booked to special events in Cumberland and Frostburg. In an effort to save money on passenger service, C&P purchased a gas electric Brill motorcar that first operated in 1929. The Brill car proved to be an underpowered unit for local terrain but it remained until passenger service was eliminated on August 31, 1942.

Coal was “king” along George’s Creek at the end of the 19th Century and the C&P prospered accordingly. In 1904, C&P transported 4,329,174 tons of black diamonds, making the railroad a major economic force in the county. Brick shop offices, built in 1901, served as landmarks in Mt. Savage and they augmented a foundry, roundhouse, machine and carpenter shops. C&P built and repaired its own steam locomotives, passenger coaches, and coal hoppers while also completing similar work for other railroads.

Declining coal revenue and increased competition caused the C&P’s demise in 1944. C&P was absorbed into the larger Western Maryland Railway system, thereby ending a colorful part of Allegany County’s railroad history.

A southwestern view of the B&O Roundhouse looking toward Virginia Avenue. Photograph World War I era.



W.R. Yantz, Fireman, in the #30, 2-8-0 Consolidation shown in the Mt. Savage Yard in 1913. Photograph courtesy G. Farrell collection.

Many reminders of the C&P's presence remain, including passenger stations at Piedmont and Frostburg, shop headquarters at Mt. Savage, artifacts at the Cardinal Mooney Museum on Old Row in Mt. Savage, and miles of abandoned roadbed, as well as a still active line from Westernport to Shaft, Maryland. Additionally, the Westernport Heritage Museum features C&P and Western Maryland Railway railroaders, local artifacts and a photograph collection, located in the former Western Maryland station in downtown Westernport. The Heritage Museum welcomes tour groups by appointment.

While not the first railroad to enter Allegany County, the Western Maryland Railroad's 1906 debut was much anticipated. A regional competitor to the B&O, it engaged primarily in freight operations, providing businesses with expanded shipping facilities near the western end of Baltimore Street in Cumberland. The city of Cumberland was well served by rail lines in the early 1900's as the Western Maryland ran east to Hagerstown, northwest to Connellsville after that line was completed in 1912, and southwest to Elkins, West Virginia, where coal and lumber industries

thrived. Construction of a passenger station on Canal Street in Cumberland, and the building of repair shops in nearby West Virginia, emphasized the railroad's commitment to the area.

The Western Maryland's Cumberland passenger station bustled with activity because trains were the only public means of transportation to isolated communities along the upper Potomac River Valley. Stations sprung up and flag stop service was offered by the railroad at many locations. Passenger service remained an option for residents until 1958 when declining revenues caused the company to seek permission to end service. The last passenger trains to Elkins departed on January 4, 1958. More than a decade later the Interstate Commerce Commission approved the Western Maryland Railway's absorption into the Baltimore and Ohio system. B&O, forerunner of CSX, had been a majority stockholder in the Western Maryland since the late 1920's but was not allowed to take over the company until 1967 after ICC approval. Complete integration of the two railroads did not occur until 1975.



Railfans and history buffs may still enjoy reminders of the Western Maryland's service to the area when they visit a restored train station on Canal Street. The former Western Maryland Railway Station hosts a variety of guest services including the C&O Canal Visitor's Center, Western Maryland Scenic Railroad's ticket office, Canal Place office, and Allegany County's Visitor Center. The Western Maryland Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society also maintains a caboose on location that is open to visitors on special occasions. Because of the local chapter's efforts and Cumberland's one hundred sixty two years of railroad history, the city was selected as the site for the National Railroad Historical Society Directors Meeting. Representatives from the United States, Canada, and Britain attended an April meeting and toured local railroad facilities. The old Western Maryland shop facilities also remain active as the Baldwin steam locomotive, two diesel locomotives, and related coaches and rolling stock owned by the scenic railroad receive service there. Visitors experience the feel, smell, and sight of yesterday when the 1916 Baldwin locomotive departs the shop yard and rumbles into the Western Maryland Station. The Scenic Railroad

also brings in revenue by rebuilding and refurbishing cars for other owners, such as MARC rail commuter service, in the old Western Maryland car shop.

Not all local railroads originated in Maryland. The West Virginia Central and Pittsburg (no "h") was founded in 1866 but actual work did not begin until 1880. The railroad's founder, Henry Gassaway Davis, became one of the most influential men of his time. Speculative purchases of vast land tracts along the North Branch of the Potomac River after the Civil War enabled him to tap valuable natural resources and become a successful entrepreneur and powerful political figure, which included a run for the Vice Presidency of the United States in 1904.

The West Virginia State Legislature granted Davis a generous charter for the WVC&P that faced formidable engineering challenges along the upper Potomac River valley. Starting near Piedmont, West Virginia, the railroad blazed a path to Bloomington, Maryland, and upstream along the headwaters of the Potomac River. Davis' railroad created hundreds of jobs, causing existing settlements to increase their economic activity and new ones to develop.

A West Virginia Central and Pittsburg Passenger train prepares to depart Elk Garden, WV for Harrison, WV. The #22 locomotive was built in 1890 and taken out of service in 1916.



Interestingly, town names along the WVC&P route reflect the powerful friendships and influences that Davis cultivated. The towns of Blaine, Barnum, Gorman, and Bayard were named after United States senatorial colleagues. Chaffee was the namesake of a representative from Colorado. The towns of Schell and Hambleton were named after bankers, while Shaw was named for Alexander Shaw, who maintained major interests in coal mining and railroading.

The WVC&P reached Elkins in 1899. Soon after extensions were built to Huttonsville, Burlington, and Davis, West Virginia. Each rail extension created spin-off economic activity. Coal hoppers, gondolas and passenger coaches were purchased from the Cumberland and Pennsylvania Railroad in Mt. Savage, Maryland, as well as one 2-8-0 locomotive. Sawmills quickly appeared in forests when the railroad arrived and saloons/hotels also continued to follow the line's progress.

Ironically, the more goods that Davis' railroad transported, the more frustrated he became with the rates charged by the B&O Railroad to ship his goods from Piedmont to Cumberland, a major rail connection. Negotiations failed to remedy the situation and a decision to circumvent the B&O by conferring with the Pennsylvania Railroad began in earnest. The Pennsylvania had established itself in Cumberland by 1879, and was a competitor of the B&O. Agreements with the Pennsylvania Railroad would allow for access to the George's Creek & Cumberland Railroad, an affiliate of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Rail yards, a roundhouse, and station would be necessary once the WVC&P reached Cumberland. An agreement between the WVC&P and Pennsylvania was reached in 1886 and Davis began work on a major extension of his railroad from Piedmont to Cumberland. This new line was named the Piedmont and Cumberland, commonly called the P&C.

This rare B&O Locomotive, built by Baldwin in 1914, and later rebuilt and renumbered, was the most powerful non-articulated steam engine in the United States. Photograph mid-1920's.



The B&O Railroad directly and indirectly created obstacles to the P&C's construction efforts. One B&O building and a section of trestle were placed in the P&C's right of way, thus halting work. More serious trouble occurred at Cookerly's farm, a location between present day Rawlings and Black Oak where armed conflict fostered resentment on both sides, as did legal battles in the courtroom. The affected property owner, Cookerly, sought legal counsel from an attorney affiliated with the B&O. The counselor argued that Davis' compensation package for right of way at the Cookerly farm was insufficient. From January to the spring of 1887, tensions escalated from courtroom to work site. Four hundred and fifty armed men, including two hundred Elk Garden miners, occupied the Cookerly farm right of way and proceeded to lay track in

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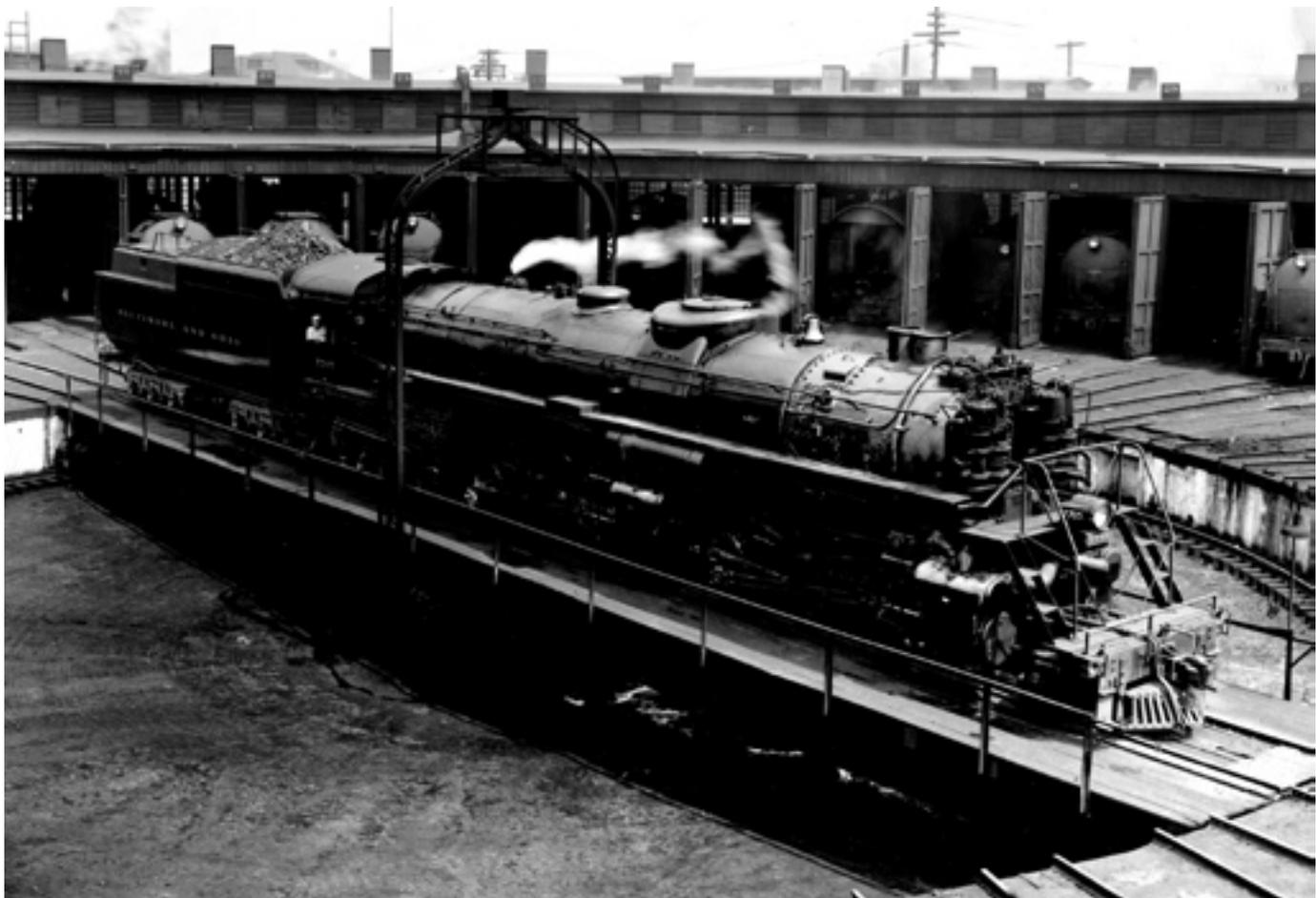
defiance of B&O protests. To prevent a counter attack, Davis kept a significant guard posted near the farm for weeks.

Believing danger had passed; Davis later reduced the number of guards. Soon after, in a surprise attack, eighty armed men arrived at the site, tore up P&C track, and remained on location to defend their handiwork and block P&C construction. Davis persisted in his efforts to complete the Cumberland extension but avoided further physical confrontations.

The legal challenges and work stoppages finally ended in July 1889 when the P&C arrived in Cumberland. A large crowd, complete with a band, greeted the first locomotive.

The WVC&P station, referred to as Central Station, and sometimes Union Station, was located at the corner of Baltimore and Canal Streets. Scheduled passenger service





A Class KB1-A spins on the turntable at the South Cumberland B&O Shops.



The east end of the westbound B&O Hump Yard in Cumberland. Notice Williams Street is still open for vehicular traffic.

saw the WVC&P leaving Cumberland at 6:30 am, arriving at Davis, West Virginia at noon, and then returning to Cumberland at 7:00 pm. The Pennsylvania Railroad and George's Creek and Cumberland Railroad served Central Station as part of an earlier agreement. A small roundhouse and rail yard were also built along the west side of Will's Creek in an area that today stretches from the Algonquin building to the Market Street Bridge. WVC&P coal hoppers connected with the GC&C near that location. All traces of the roundhouse have disappeared although the general area still sees limited traffic from the Scenic Railroad. Central Station remained in service until August 1913, when the Western Maryland Railroad opened its three-story station a few hundred yards to the south.

Davis' WVC&P did not last long. Discussions were conducted between the WVC&P and the Western Maryland Railroad about a possible sale of the former line. Stockholders of both railroads eventually approved the sale in 1903 and the WVC&P passed into history, becoming the West Virginia Division of the Western Maryland Railroad. Remnants of the WVC&P Railroad exist in the form of stonework and abandoned rail beds throughout the upper Potomac region. A still-active section of the original WVC&P line is operated by CSX from 21st Bridge near Dawson to Bayard in Garrett County, thus paying tribute to Henry Gassaway Davis and his workers who created lasting economic development throughout the region.

Other small, narrow gauge railroads criss-crossed Allegany, Garrett, and Mineral counties to access timber. Due to the nature of their work, logging railroads were fleeting because their purposes ended quickly when natural resources were depleted. According to one historian, there were at least forty-four logging railroads in the region. Most of their stories have been lost to time but several of

the more prominent operations have been at least partially documented.

The Mertens family owned large tracts of land in eastern Allegany County. To transport timber resources from mountainous locations, Green Ridge Railroad was chartered in 1883. An account of the GRR listed twenty-six miles of track, twenty-three freight cars, and one passenger car. Little is known of its exact route although one may still trace the roadbed between Green Ridge, Town Hill, and Fifteen Mile Creek. Apparently, the railroad ceased operation in 1897.

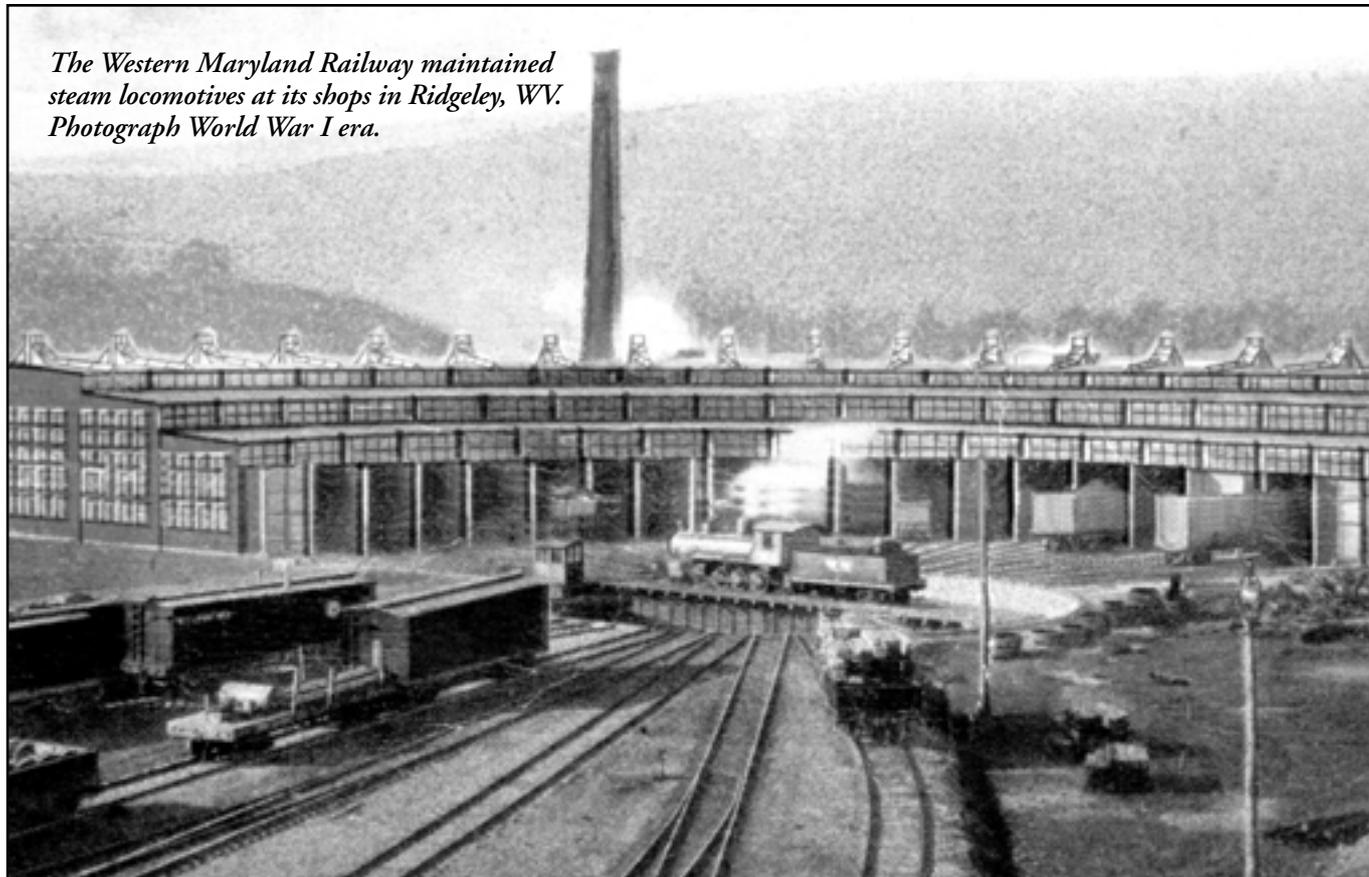
Kulp Lumber Company was incorporated in 1895 for the purpose of establishing sawmill operations in Oldtown, Maryland. Right of way for the narrow gauge, Kulp Railroad, was acquired so that a connection to the Western Maryland Railroad could be established. Company housing, a round house to service steam locomotives, and the sawmill provided Oldtown with skilled and semi-skilled jobs.

Kulp Railroad approached Lower Town Creek Road and continued upstream at Town Creek until it reached Flintstone, Maryland. Numerous spurs reached the extremes of company property. The death of Monroe Kulp, owner, in 1911 dealt a serious blow to the company, and for reasons not completely understood today, the Kulp Railroad and related logging operations ended in 1914.

At the opposite end of the Allegany County the Juniata (pronounced wan-ee-ta in Allegany County) Lumber Company operated a narrow gauge railroad. H.C. Hoover and Cummings McNutt, two Pennsylvania lumbermen, transferred equipment to Midlothian, Maryland, to establish a sawmill. Their logging railroad exited Midlothian in a northerly direction until it reached Winebrenner's Run near Big Savage Mountain, a distance of about twelve miles. Juniata



The Western Maryland Railway maintained steam locomotives at its shops in Ridgeley, WV. Photograph World War I era.



produced rail ties, raw furniture, tan bark, and mine props. By 1913, their sole locomotive, a Climax model, was sold and the railroad ceased to operate.

Western Maryland's rail industry continues to thrive with the recent rise in coal prices. Coal hoppers move tons of coal to eastern ports and markets and to regional power plants. CSX reports coal traffic has maximized available locomotives and crews. Passenger service also remains in Cumberland with daily Amtrak stops at the downtown station. Current trends indicate that Western Maryland's rail industry and heritage will extend well into the future.



The WVC&P was purchased by the Western Maryland Railway. A Combine Car awaiting cargo at the Elk Garden Station.

For additional information on local railroads, see Tall Pines and Winding Rivers by Benjamin Kline, Jr.; Cumberland and Pennsylvania Railroad, by Deane Mellander; The Cumberland and Pennsylvania Railroad Revisited, by Patrick Stakem; To Cumberland and Beyond, by Bert Pennypacker; Rails to the Big Vein, by Deanne Mellander; West Virginia Central and Pittsburg Railway, by Alan Clarke; John Mash, Land of the Living; and Coal Mining and Railroads, by Al Feldstein.

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