



## The PLS GAZETTE

P.O. Box 26202  
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### FIRST CLASS

Ron Shupard shows the progress of the wood reefer he is building.



Ron Shupard



# The PLS GAZETTE

November–December 2012

A newsletter of the Pennsylvania Live Steamers, Inc.

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## From Along the PLS Main Line

As we approach the end of 2012 we can reflect back on some of what has been accomplished in the past year. Of note was the completion of the rebuild of the 4¾-inch gauge track between the station and the tunnel to improve the grade on that section. Then came the addition of three tracks to the 7¼-inch gauge car barn, including a new access ramp. The signaling of the 7¼-inch main line was finally completed after many years, the final piece being the installation of a very nice cantilever signal bridge on the main line adjacent to the station. And that was in addition to the ongoing maintenance of track, structures and grounds which require never-ending attention. To those who have participated in those tasks, PLS thanks you.

Certainly no less necessary to the overall success of PLS are the support activities for run days and special events. Some of those are the kitchen, snack table and sales table operation and coordination; the coordination and cooking duties for the picnic and pot-luck dinners; and the set up and take down of everything at each and every event. To those who make it their responsibility to see that these and other tasks are completed each run day, PLS thanks you.

Hurricane Sandy blew through PLS but did relatively little damage. We lost a few minor tree branches, but the Perkiomen Creek stayed within its banks, so we were spared the flood

damage that we suffered from hurricane Irene in 2011. However, we were forced to cancel the final scheduled run day, as we were without electricity for eight days following the storm. I know many of our members suffered greatly from that storm; we wish them the best and hopefully all have recovered.

Elections for PLS officers and board members are held in March each year. In order to hold those elections, a slate of candidates needs to be compiled during January. To do this we need two

regular member volunteers to serve as the nominating committee. Each committee member will be required to contact approximately 15 to 20 members from an eligibility list and encourage them to run for office. It really doesn't require a lot of time or effort. Volunteers were requested at the November 17 business meeting, but there were no positive responses. If you are a regular member, I urge you to support your club by volunteering for this important task. Contact Lee Nonnemacher

*(Continued on page 2)*

**New cantilever signal bridge** completes the PLS 7¼-inch main signal system.

Lee Nonnemacher





From Along the PLS Main Line

(Continued from page 1)

acher ([president@palivesteamers.org](mailto:president@palivesteamers.org).)

To all of our members a joyous holi- day season and best wishes for a happy and healthy year in 2013.

Safe Steaming,  
Lee Nonnemacher – President



Both, Lee Nonnemacher

Damage from Super Storm Sandy was relatively light at PLS, but the storm did leave us without power for eight days.



2013 PLS Calendar of Events

- Saturday, Jan. 19 Board of Directors Meeting - 9:30 AM
- Saturday, Feb. 16 Board of Directors Meeting - 9:30 AM

Club Membership News

PLS welcomes Robert D. Hillen- brand, who recently applied for Regu- lar membership.

Membership Gauge

- As of November 30, PLS has:
- 105 Regular Members
  - 289 Associate Members
  - 8 Honorary Members

Donation Acknowledgements

PLS wishes to thank the following members for donations received dur- ing October and November: Paul Rice, John Caldwell, and George Lord.

Thank you also to the Delaware Valley Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society.

Welsh Coal for Sale

PLS associate member Jason Kovac has acquired a quantity of Welsh coal which is considered by many to be very fine steaming coal. The size is large bean. Jason is making this coal available to anyone wanting to pur- chase it at a cost of \$53.00 for 22 lbs., including shipping via USPS flat rate. Bags of 55 lbs. are also available for \$95.00 but must be picked up in New Jersey. For further information or to order, contact Jason at [kavacjason@gmail.com](mailto:kavacjason@gmail.com) or phone 732-770-9625.

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lived as in the fall of 1993 as I was of- fered a job at Amtrak as an Engineer of Standards in the track department. This time I was responsible for setting up the same turnouts I constructed as a project manager at Bethlehem Steel. I held that position for about 11 years and then was promoted to a director on track construction projects. That means, I monitor spending on the track programs and determine what resources are necessary.

I finally bought my first locomotive around 1985. It was a mostly complete Little Engines 1” scale 0-6-0. I pur- chased it from a guy in Ambler who was using it as a decoration behind the bar in his basement. By this time I ac- tually bought my uncle’s lathe and with the help of Wayne Godshall converted the engine to a 2-6-0. I ran it for about 5 years then started having problems with the boiler. A steam operated water pump helped but I soon learned there was a leak around one of the bottom

flues on the front tube plate. Further investigation led to the discovery of a sand inclusion in the bronze casting so the whole boiler is now set aside until I get the nerve to build a new one.

During the early and mid 1990’s I made several trips to the UK on business and visited the shop of A. J. Reeves near Birmingham, (they are the UK version of Little Engines). Over a period of 5 years I eventually came home with castings for several ¾” scale engines including a 4-4-0, an 0-8-0 and a 4-4-2 named Maisie. I also have a partially constructed WW-I US army 2-6-2 in 3 ½ gauge and a Little Engines 1” scale Reading Camelback. My phi- losophy is if the opportunity presents itself, “buy it.” You may not get an- other chance and you can always sell it at a later date. I still think the smaller gauges are fine as they are considerably less expensive, you do not need super size machine shop to construct it. You can still ride behind them and they are

easier to transport and store.

I joined PLS around 1995 and was primarily interested in ¾” and 1” scale but a 1 ½” scale diesel outline loco came available about that time so I took the plunge into 1 ½” scale. I have not regretted making this move as I have had a blast running it. So much so, that I began purchasing castings for an Allen 2-8-0. I just started working on the frame when Bill Love passed away and I soon purchased his Al- len 0-4-2 Chloe. This has been the primary focus of my live steam spare time for the past several years and have progressed it to a frame drive wheels and pilot truck. After visiting Train Mountain this past year I am anxious to get Chloe completed so I can move onto the 2-8-0 project.

As to the future of the club, I see a couple of big challenges ahead, aging membership being first and foremost. There is much left to accomplish at PLS but we can not continue to depend on our older members to do it for us. There is no magical “they” we can point to only “us.”

Another issue which I am sure will have to be dealt with if we are to sur- vive, is the 7 ½” question. The advent of the super railroads has changed the way we look at our hobby . We are no longer a hobby of builders but a hobby of operators and live steamers are not content to stay on home rails. Where as, 15 years ago we were deep inside 7 ¼” territory, today we are the fron- tier. Right about now our older mem- bers are saying “Convert? Hell no!”, that is certainly understandable. Other clubs are wrestling with the same ques- tions. As 7 ½” spreads, the resale value of 7 ¼” depreciates. I am building my Chloe so it can be changed, (narrow frame, wide cylinders). That way if I ever sell it or move elsewhere it can still be utilized.

My other interests include; history, genealogy and travel. I have been to 47 of the 50 states, 6 of the provinces of Canada and 9 European countries including Russia. I also teach adult Sunday school and participate in the local Habitat for Humanity effort.

I am looking forward to retiring on December 1, 2023! 🍷





# People at PLS

Compiled by Lynn Hammond



Allen Underkofler

## Paul Rice – *Writes about his life and interest in trains.*

meet Harry Quick in his shop in the old Kaier's Brewery about 1974. He passed away in 1976 and most of his equipment quickly vanished. I often wonder what became of the Hudson loco I saw way back when?

In July of 1965, during a trip to the grocery store, I spied a copy of *Popular Mechanics*. On

the cover was a picture of a kid about my age operating an amusement park size steam locomotive. Inside was a how to feature article on building your own backyard railroad plus another feature on Seymour Johnson's Goleta Valley Western Railroad. The magazine cost 35 cents and I still have it, (you can download the article for free from Google).

My next exposure was about three years later when I became a Cub Scout and started to receive *Boy's Life* magazine. In the classified section, there was an advertisement for Little Engines, ("Just bolt them together"). So for a buck which represented a whole months allowance, I sent away and got a catalog. I particularly remember the 1" scale Camelback 0-4-0 cost about \$1,000 for the rough castings but you needed something called a lathe. I had no idea what that was in but I was told my uncle had one and kept it in the basement. I asked him if I could borrow it and he laughed at me when I told him what I wanted it for.

I graduated high school in 1978 with a vocational degree in drafting.

After High School I ended up at Bethlehem Steel as an inspector in the Saucon Beam Yard. I quickly learned the realities of how the economy worked and faced with a layoff I decided to study mechanical engineering at Penn State's Hazleton Campus. I graduated with an Associate Degree in 1981 and immediately reenrolled in the Railway Engineering Technology course at the Wilkes-Barre Campus. I earned my second degree in 1982.

Shortly after I landed a job on a startup shortline that was buying some track from Conrail. After about a month I qualified as a conductor and spent the next three years rotating between operations, track maintenance and clerical positions.

In 1984 an opportunity came along to rejoin Bethlehem Steel at their Frog and Switch Division in Steelton, (near Harrisburg), as a designer / draftsman. The Frog and Switch built turnouts for the class 1 railroads and transit systems. I worked on projects for Conrail, Septa, CSX, Union Pacific and Burlington Northern. The final project I worked on was the design and manufacture of high speed turnouts for Amtrak's Northeast Corridor.

While living in Harrisburg I met my wife, the former Pamela Saylor from Lewistown, Pa. We met in 1988 and got married in 1990. Our plans to settle down and buy a home in Harrisburg were short lived as Bethlehem announced they were closing my plant in 1992.

My next job took me to Birmingham, Alabama doing similar work as at Steelton but that too was short

## FOR SALE

Little Engines NEW 2-6-0 mogul. This locomotive has not been rebuilt—it is totally all new. The loco will be 100% ready for its new owner by the time you read this. It has steel boiler with copper tubes, 2 Super Scale injectors, 1 steam pump and electric lights in cab and headlight. and the tender is fiber glass. It has vacuum brakes on tender and steam on locomotive. Electric line and vacuum line run to rear of tender for train hook up for brakes and battery power for lights. It was test run on November 23 at PLS. Loco is at my home now to be winterized. Anyone interested in this loco contact me at [bgsberk@comcast.net](mailto:bgsberk@comcast.net) for video of it running and price.

— Bruce Saylor



## Car Barn for 4 3/4-Inch Gauge Equipment – Survey

A growing number of members who operate 4 3/4-inch gauge equipment have expressed their desire to have a facility, separate from the locomotive storage building, in which an entire intact train can be stored. There have been various proposals over the years but there was never enough interest to proceed with anything. Now that more members have expressed interest, informal discussions have led to proposals for facilities at several different locations on PLS property. Presently,

the location that seems to be the most practical from size, accessibility and security standpoints is in an area west of the clubhouse and caboose, between the main lines and the access road near the front of the property. Keep in mind, this is all preliminary and nothing will be done unless and until approved through our formal process.

The purposes of this article are to provide information on what is being discussed and to ask for input from owners of 4 3/4-inch gauge equipment.

The Board of Directors would like to hear from regular member equipment owners who would be truly interested in storing whole trains of 4 3/4-inch equipment for a cost comparable to other storage tracks at PLS. Responses will be used for preliminary sizing purposes, so please respond only if you would consider taking space in such a facility. Include the approximate number of feet of track that you would require. Responses should be e-mailed to [president@palivesteamers.org](mailto:president@palivesteamers.org).

## Veterans Day Weekend at PLS

Sunday, November 11, was Veterans Day. The sun was shining and it was 65 degrees which brought to the track several members of PLS. John Bortz had his RDG 4-4-2 camelback out, Jay and I had his PRR 0-4-0 out, Rich Falzone was running his D&H diesels and Bob Freer was polishing the rails on the 1" track with his D&H RS-3. Bruce Barrett was busy filling his new car barn track and Lee Nonnemacher was working on a flat car. The steam locomotive boilers were then blown dry and prepared for winter storage, a

process which was delayed by the power outage at the club. As it turned out it made for a great run late in the season.

— Ron Shupard

**PLS members** are shown on Saturday, the 10<sup>th</sup> after lifting the turntable off the center pin. This will allow a new adjustable center pin to be installed to counter the affect of the tree roots underneath.





# "OWNEY"

## The Railroad Postal Dog By Bob Thomas



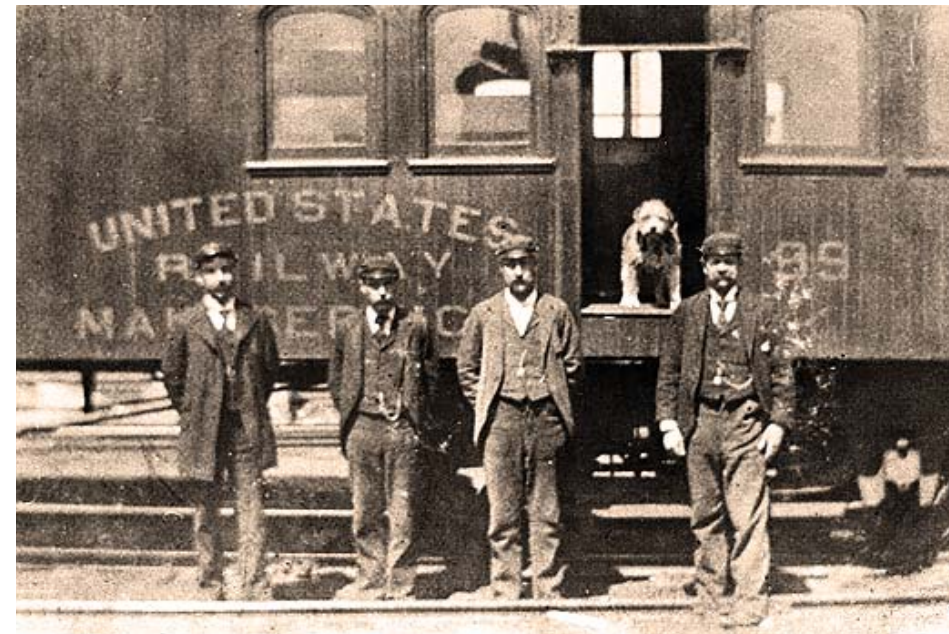
Railroads and the U.S. postal system were inextricably entwined throughout the long era of our nation's heavy dependence on railroads for fast and reliable delivery of mail. As with many historic events, the first railroad mail route in the country was established locally, between Philadelphia and West Chester, in 1832. Delivery of mail by rail grew slowly until 1838 when Congress designated all railroads in the country as "Post Routes."

Although responsibility for delivering mail had been the exclusive province of Post Offices, much of that responsibility was eventually delegated to railroads. The Railway Mail Service (RMS) staffed cars with highly trained men and women who worked in Railway Post Office (RPO) cars equipped with special interiors that

facilitated sorting mail while the train was en route. Sealed mail sacks were opened while the train was in motion, letters sorted according to destination, then repacked in sacks and off-loaded at stations for re-routing on connecting trains or transport to a Post Office for local delivery. Processing mail on RPOs was so comprehensive that mail originating on the east coast could travel across the continent to the west without entering a single intervening post office along the way. The RMS once employed 20,000 railway mail clerks who operated over 216,000 miles of track across the country!

With that background we move on to the travels and nationwide notoriety of the central figure in this narrative: a mongrel terrier named Owney. Around 1889 Owney reportedly lived

with an Albany Postal Clerk whom he often followed to work at the Post Office. Other clerks took a liking to Owney who soon discovered his favorite pastime was crawling onto a mail sack for a snooze. He was so fond of mail sacks he began to accompany them on carts that took mail to the Albany railroad station. It wasn't long before he followed sacks into the RPO, where he would remain even after the train pulled out. He might then jump out at the first station stop or continue on to some distant station. Before long he became well known to mail clerks along the line who would commemorate his visit by attaching a metal mail tag to his collar. He might stay in a new town for a day or a couple of weeks, usually cared for by the local postmaster, or he would jump on a train right



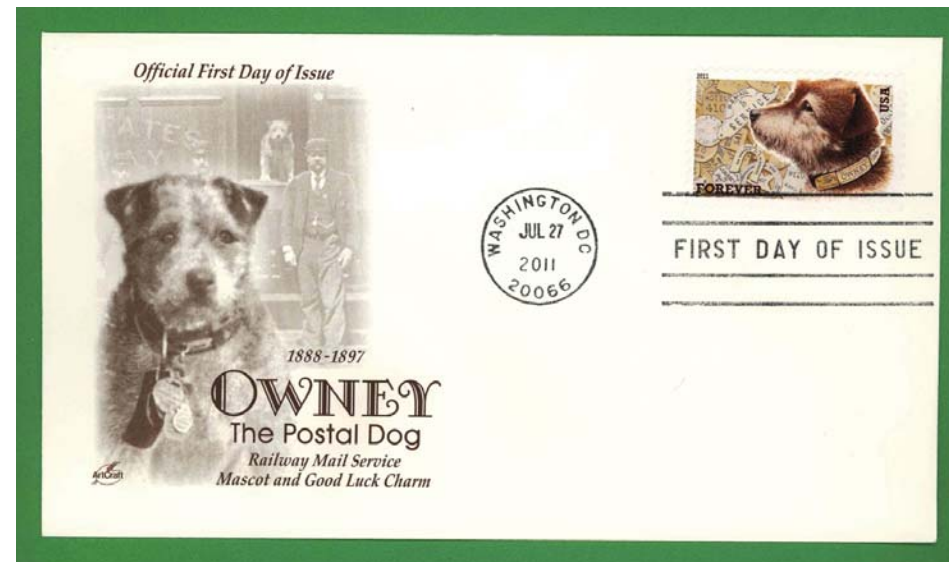
**Above:** Owney peers from the door of a decrepit wood-sheathed RPO, waiting impatiently while "his" crew poses for photographs. **Right:** 1939 *Popular Mechanics* advertisement for RPO training. **Below:** The author's First Day Cover with Owney's commemorative Forever stamp.

back to Albany, all at his own whim. As time went on someone started a journal that followed Owney to document his travels.

With such wide ranging journeys, Owney soon became a popular figure not only among mail clerks, but through newspaper reports with an adoring public. He even was the subject of a *New York Times* article in 1892! Over the years, Owney's range extended to encompass every state in the Union and most of the U.S. railroads that carried mail. He made short trips to Mexico and Alaska and in 1895

he was accompanied by the purser of a Northern Pacific steamboat on a highly publicized four-month journey to China and Japan, where he was received with the same adulation as bestowed on him at home. Owney was one famous, lovable canine!

Owney continued riding the rails after his odyssey to the Orient, but after eight years on the road, ageing and in poor health, he was less compliant to human interference with his freedom. He was cranky and became easily agitated by the ceaseless turmoil surrounding his fame. After all, the fel-



low had visited over 1000 destinations, based on the tags he had accumulated, and he was worn out. One day in 1897 a clerk at the Toledo Post Office tried to look at the tags on Owney's collar when the exasperated dog became violent, turned on the clerk and bit him. The situation escalated to the extent a U.S. Marshal had to be called in and poor Owney was shot dead.

That was not the end of the beloved mascot, however. Owney's lifeless body was preserved by a taxidermist and placed on display at the Post Office Department's headquarters until 1993 when he was moved to an exhibit in front of a restored RPO at the new U.S. National Postal Museum in Washington, D.C. A commemorative stamp was subsequently authorized and on July 27, 2011 a ceremony was held at the museum for public issuance of his stamp. The portrait of Owney on his stamp is overly idealized, representing him a trim well-groomed dog bearing no resemblance to the real life scruffy mutt. Nevertheless, Owney's very own 41-cent "Forever" stamp ensures recognition of that lovable dog who preferred to travel by train.

Happy Holidays, everyone. 🐕