



May - June 2025

THE PLS GAZETTE

A newsletter of the Pennsylvania Live Steamers, Inc.

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A turning Point ?

We are off to a great start this season!

The Memorial Day weekend meet and April run day both had the highest attendance that I can remember in many years.

It feels like a turning point, you know that point in a game when after a certain play the game feels decidedly influenced in a certain direction. Judging by the amount of out of state visitors and our own members it is a very positive turn. We hope to see it continue.

We all owe thanks to the following people for their efforts.

First to Bruce Barrett and his helper Big John Gieb. They saved the day Saturday morning of the Memorial Day meet. The club was down and out of water for the lower yard and turntable area.

It really affected the whole railroad. Turns out we had a pipe burst at the bottom of Beck Tower, a musty place home to spiders and a place that is hard to climb down into. Through quick troubleshooting, finding spare pumps and working in a cramped and dirty place our heroes emerged victorious, and water was promptly restored. Many thanks' guys!

Many thanks to Gwen Forsythe and her crew of Naomi Good, Olivia Good, Madeline Good, and Joan Cahill for the once again fantastic food service!

Thank you, Steve Leatherman, for a great job organizing and grilling the Potluck dinner Saturday evening. Another job well done. We enjoyed it thoroughly.

Thank you, Steve Mallon, event coordinator, and the people who helped with gate duty.

Thank you, Kathy Parris, for managing the table sales, and snack table.

A special Thank You to Rich Polleto who for years has been helping by preparing the club for run days and meets and cleans up afterwards. Quietly behind the scenes, Rich empties trash, cleans, sets up tables and chairs and much more so we can all enjoy the day. Rich you're a gem!

The following pages document who the visitors were with their large-scale equipment at the Memorial Day meet. Enjoy!

I apologize to the gauge one folks for not having a list of out of state people there. I know there is a good representation there as well.

See you at the track soon!

John Forsythe

President PLS, Inc.

PLS Club Steam Loco Update



Rebuilt Boiler being test fitted on the chassis.

2025 PLS Upcoming Events

- Sat, Jun 21 Board of Directors Meeting - 9:30 AM
Membership Meeting – 12:30 PM
- Sun, Jun 22 Run Day – Members & Guest
(Rain Date Jun 29)
- Sat, Jul 19 Annual PLS Picnic – 12:00 Noon
- Sun, Jul 27 Run Day – Members & Guest
(Rain Date Aug 3)
- Sat, Aug 16 Board of Directors Meeting - 9:30 AM
Membership Meeting – 12:30 PM
- Sun, Aug 24 Run Day – Members & Guest
(No Rain Date)

Membership Gauge

Currently PLS has:

- 92 Regular Members
- 12 Probationary Members
- 136 Associate Members
- 2 Honorary Members

Club Membership News

PLS welcomes new Associate members: Christopher Kaloudis, Vandy Akin, John Urmson, and Girish Kale. We also welcome new Probationary Regular members, Bruce Daddi and Kaeden Peffel.



Donation

Acknowledgements

PLS wishes to thank the following for donations received during April and May: Pat Murphy, Pete Brown, Steve Leatherman, Luigi Ricci Moretti, Jim Adams, Rich Poletto, Jack Evans, Gwen Forsythe, Paul Miller and the Becker Family Foundation.

Thank you also to those members who donated snacks and baked goods sold at the Spring Meet. They were enjoyed.

Pennsylvania Live Steamers, Inc.

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Tales From a Retired Engineer: “Mr. Stop Sock”

Author: Mark Cahill

During my training to become a locomotive engineer for New Jersey Transit (NJT), I was required to qualify on the physical characteristics of ***all*** the railroad territory I was to operate on. As a result of selecting the Newark Division of NJT, I had to qualify on the following lines: Northeast Corridor (NEC) including New York Penn Station (NYP) and Sunnyside Yard (SSY), Raritan Valley, North Jersey Coast and Atlantic City.

Physical characteristics qualifying consisted of studying the timetable, maps and riding the head end of trains observing and learning everything (e.g. track numbers, rules in effect, interlockings, signal locations and their appearances, passenger stations and their platform lengths, other non-passenger stations listed on the station page et al). This was followed up with written exams and oral exams usually conducted by a Road Foreman.

Because NJT owns and operates the Atlantic City Line, we were also required to qualify on the NEC between Frankford Junction and the lower level of Philadelphia’s 30th St. Station.

Qualifying the Philadelphia territory was almost more difficult than qualifying NYP and SSY. 30th St. Station has fewer tracks than NYP (11 vs 21), but there is a large yard (Race St.) adjacent to the station and an extremely complex interlocking named “Zoo” that is integral to train operations in this area.

“Zoo” Interlocking’s name comes from the fact that the interlocking is adjacent to the Philadelphia Zoo. However, most of us thought the name “Zoo” better articulated the highly complex layout of the interlocking.

“Zoo” interlocking is where the NEC connects with the Harrisburg Line in a “Wye” configuration. Also, there are connecting tracks that lead to the upper-level tracks at 30th St. Station. These upper-level tracks are used by the regional rail division of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA), specifically SEPTA’s Trenton Line and Chestnut Hill West Line.

The number of unique routes through “Zoo” interlocking are mind-boggling! So, it took many hours of studying maps and walking around the entire Philly territory just to come close to understanding it all.

They gave us about 2 weeks to qualify the Philly territory.

While qualifying by riding the head end of trains was possible, it was not practical because only Amtrak and NJT operated on the lower level at 30th St. Station. If I had rode the head end of an Amtrak train, I would see the territory go by very quickly and then have to ride all the way to either Trenton, NJ or Wilmington, DE before I could get a ride back. I probably would have only gotten a few quick looks at the territory over several hours. And the headways on NJT’s Atlantic City line were 90 minutes. Again, too much time wasted waiting for a return trip.

Tales From a Retired Engineer: “Mr. Stop Sock”

As a result, walking the territory made more sense. Well into my 2nd week of qualifying, I was so exhausted from walking from 30th St. Station all the way to Zoo and back several times that I decided to ride the head end of an Amtrak train to Harrisburg (even though my head-end pass was not valid to Harrisburg). But I thought, what the heck, the worst that could happen is the Amtrak engineer saying “Sorry, you can’t ride”.

At that time, Amtrak was operating a modest number of trains between 30th St. Station and Harrisburg, PA. After checking schedules, I chanced to find the conductor of the next Harrisburg-bound train asking him if I could ride the head end. He replied, “Go ask the engineer”.

I proceeded to the locomotive (a P42), knocked on the door, opened the door, introduced myself and asked if I could ride to Harrisburg. The engineer replied, “of course” (he may have been happy to have company on the trip).

I took my left-hand seat and we soon departed. After seeing “Zoo” Interlocking from the head end, there was nothing left to do except to enjoy the ride.

The first station stop was Paoli. Just west of the station was and still is “Paoli” Interlocking. Long ago it was a 4-track “complete” interlocking and also had a connection to Paoli Yard. PRR MU trains and later SEPTA trains originated or terminated in this yard at Paoli. Today, west of Paoli, the original 4-track PRR main line is reduced to 2 tracks and the yard has been removed (replaced by Frazer Yard a few miles to the west of Paoli).

The westward home signals on tracks 3 & 4 at “Paoli” Interlocking were mounted to the overhead road bridge (N. Valley Rd.) at the extreme west end of the station platform. Due to the platform’s length, the engineer had to spot the train as close to the signal as possible (we were on track #4). Because of this, the signal was directly above us and no longer easily visible. You had to lean forward and look up through the windshield or stick your head out the side window to see the signal.

As soon as the train came to a complete stop, the engineer reached down into his “Grip” (that’s what engineers called their briefcase or bag), pulled out a white sports sock and placed it over the throttle handle. The sock had all types of danger writing on it, a growling face, the word ‘STOP’ in numerous places and other things.

Immediately I asked the engineer, “What in the heck is that?” He replied, “Oh, that’s Mr. Stop Sock!” I said, “Who or what is Mr. Stop Sock?” He said this was his visual reminder that there was a signal just in front of him and that after receiving “two-to-go” from the conductor, to remember to check that the signal was displaying a proceed aspect prior to releasing the brakes and throttling out.

Tales From a Retired Engineer: “Mr. Stop Sock”

Now throughout my career, I saw other engineers who had their own way of protecting themselves while stopped at a stop signal not easily visible. Some would: put the windshield shade all the way down; put the locomotive in “neutral”; put a sign up on the control stand; remove the throttle (you could do that on an MU) among others. But for all of these techniques, I thought Mr. Stop Sock was the most creative (and fun too!)

I chanced once to tell this story to my son. To my surprise, one Christmas, he gifted me a “Mr. Stop Sock” (see photo).

He had taken the time to mark up a white sock based on the story he had heard from me! To this day, I think of it as the greatest Christmas gift I have ever received.



Later in my career, as an instructor engineer, I often either told the Mr. Stop Sock story to my engineer students or actually pulled it out of my bag and put it on the throttle for them to see. They all got a big kick out of it.

Here are 2 photos of how I used Mr. Stop Sock. The 1st photo is my MU throttle handle (just mounted in a workbench vise). The 2nd photo is the handle covered up by Mr. Stop Sock when I would be stopped at a signal not easily visible. I hope you enjoyed this story.



PLS Spring Meet 2025

Photos by Allen Underkofler

PLS Spring Meet was full of action this year. Lots of trains on both the 1.5" & 1" Mains as well as the Gauge 1 Layouts. Thanks to Gwen Forsythe and her crew Breakfast and Lunch served inside Building 1 was a success. Also, a big Thank you to Steve Leatherman who organized and led the Saturday night Potluck Dinner. We also enjoyed the company of many visiting Railroaders, see the next page for some example photos.



The Club train was full most of time.



Rick Stoughton with his 1" RS-3



Mark Cahill at the controls, club Loco ran much better after we installed a new battery.



Mike Tillger with his Cow and Calf Switcher set.



The Yard was full most of the time and the Water Tap was busy.



Mike Moore's portable Layout was very active all weekend.



The Main Gauge 1 Layout was also very active all weekend.



Mike Moore and his crew getting ready for another run.



Terry Weinstein our Track Gang Leader is enjoying some of his handy work.

PLS Spring Meet 2025

The Spring Meet was also well attended by many guests, coming from near and far. It was nice to see a wide variety of equipment, both Steam and Diesel. Photos by Allen Underkoffler, Steve Mallon and Bonny Slater.



Henry Ramalho. 1 inch Canadian Pacific Hudson. Montreal Canada



Jeremy Gay. 1.5 inch CN Diesel 2309 and 1.5 inch Northern Steam locomotive. Cherryfield Maine



Tom Battle. 1 inch C&O RS3. New Jersey



Matt and Ed Gilhooley 1.5 inch NYO&W. NW2. long Island NY



Adam Maddlinger from New Jersey, President of NJLS. He had a 1.5" 0-6-0 Steam Loco.



Zachary Alvarez and Ron Cicchini. 1.5 inch Leigh Valley Doodlebug. Bridgeport New Jersey.



CN Diesel 2309 in the Yard with B&O 752 in the foreground note the happy passenger.

Repairs at PLS

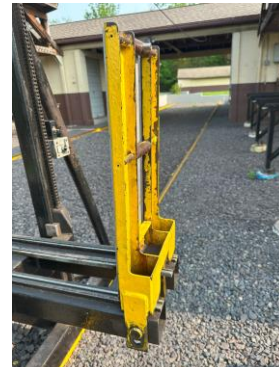
Author John Forsythe

Many thanks to "Uncle Jim" (Jim Salmons) for his repair of the transfer table connecting track to the east side bays and storage at building three. The locator pin broke off somehow on Sunday of the Memorial Day meet. This left using the transfer table particularly perilous in moving equipment on and off the steaming bays and storage tracks. This was not an easy job as it required removing a hardened broken screw. I know the completed job was a full day's work or more. Much of it in getting the broken screw out and chasing new threads then machining a new pin. Here is the replaced pin.



Editors Note:

Safety Rule number 1: When moving the Transfer Table always make sure both Yellow Wings are in the upright and locked position. Only lower a Wing when you are making final alignment to the Track you are connecting to. Once you have transferred your equipment return the Wing to its upright and locked position.



Wildlife at PLS

Author John Forsythe

This time of year, we usually see the Killdeer birds nesting in the yard with their awkward way of detracting attention away from the nest. We have not seen them yet this year, but we have other egg layers at work. Notice this snapping turtle leaving a clutch of five eggs under the ties in Murphy siding. A cone now marks the spot where the eggs are. Please be careful in this area to not disturb the eggs and let nature be at work. With any luck we will see little turtles in about three months. The incubation period is from 80-90 days, and egg laying occurs usually in June.



Wildlife at PLS

Author John Forsythe

The turtles are much less intrusive than the kind of nesters that make these homes. Here are three active groundhog holes that probably will eventually cause some disturbance in the tracks.

Picture one, this borrow is under the multi gauge track near the turntable.



Picture two is under the gauge one track in the infield.



Picture three is under the one 1" and 1.5" mains near the entrance to the property.



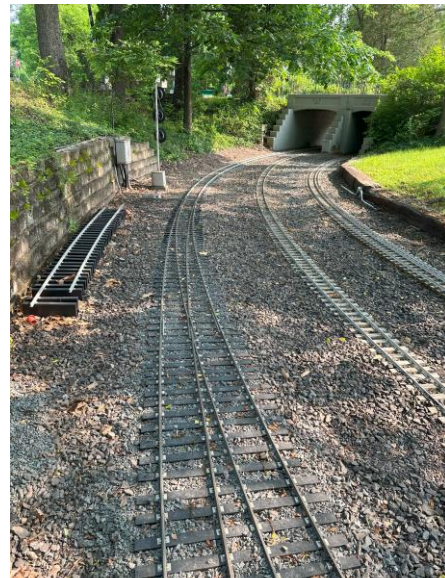
Oh, how we miss Hank Riley. Hank was our go to person for grounds maintenance. He would very quickly be on the spot with his "Have a Heart Trap" or in some instances a gun to remove the groundhogs.

Hank passed away rather suddenly a few years ago. This is an invitation to pick up where Hank left off.

Workdays at PLS



We are starting spot replacements on both the 1" & 1.5" Mains along the South property. Many Ties were damaged by the Sun (no shade) and the tops were split open in some cases.



The Turnout at the Three-Way Signal, the rebuild has now been complete.



The PLS GAZETTE

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FIRST CLASS



Congratulations Steve Mallon his Number 14 Baldwin Switcher is on the road.