

CHAPTER X

BUILDING THE RAILROAD

Convenience and rapidity of transportation has always had a great deal to do with the growth of communities. While no part of Pleasants county is at a great distance from the Ohio river, yet that stream was not always available, because of the poor roads and also because navigation was frequently suspended for weeks or even months by low water or ice. The carrying of live stock was very uncertain, so that as late as the eighties it was customary to drive cattle overland to Pittsburgh and Baltimore. Nevertheless there were many steamboats on the river and they seemed to thrive.

In the earlier part of the century the boats were given rather fanciful names, such as Lady Byron, Rambler, Mount Vernon, Magnolia, Lady Madison and Reaper. Sidewheel boats were most popular in the seventies, of this type were the Courier, Express, Diurnal and St. Lawrence, broad of beam and imposing with their high wheel houses, the interiors enameled and gilded, so that they indeed resembled floating palaces. There were also fine boats of the stern-wheel class, such as the Andes, one of the largest on the river, the Mallie Ragan and Carrie Brooks. All the tow boats of course were stern-wheelers.

The fare from St. Marys to Wheeling varied from two to three dollars, and this included berth and meals. If for any reason the boat was delayed the passengers were at no extra expense, and it has happened that they have enjoyed the hospitality of the steamboat company for a week without other charge than the regular fare.

Smaller steamboats linked together the small towns in

daily trips, and these could often ply when the larger boats were laid up. One of these was the stern-wheeler *Welcome*, a very swift boat, owned and operated by Captain Mike Davis, who resided here for a time. Another was the *Scioto*, owned by Captain Dillon, which made daylight trips between Marietta and Wheeling. It was a side-wheel boat with two decks, and considered the fastest boat on the river. Captain Dillon took great pride in maintaining his schedule of time, and when in a hurry would pay no attention to the frantic gesticulations of would-be passengers at small landings. On one occasion he made the run from Marietta to St. Marys in one hour and five minutes—a record which, we believe, has never been equalled.

In 1882 came the practical development of the plan of building a railroad from Wheeling down the river to Parkersburg, with the further intention of completing it to Cincinnati, whence its first name of the Wheeling, Parkersburg and Cincinnati railroad. It was to be a continuation of the Pittsburgh, Wheeling and Kentucky railroad, commonly called the *Pewiky*, designed as a part of the great Pennsylvania system, and linked with that corporation until it was absorbed by the Baltimore & Ohio Company.

St. Marys had improved but little in the last five years, yet it was apparent that Creel street was already beginning to be deserted as a business center. The firm of S. Gallaher & Son had moved up town to the northwest corner of George and Second streets, and had built the two-story business house now occupied by E. R. Smith. A millinery store had been established by Mrs. L. G. Brock on the lot now owned by Captain J. C. McLaughlin. The first brick sidewalk in town was built around the Gallaher store. The Cain House and several stores had erected street lights, consisting of oil lamps enclosed in square glass cases perched on top of tall posts.

A summary of the business men of the town was made by the Oracle, showing seven merchants, seven lawyers, three hotels, three physicians, two blacksmiths, two insurance agents, one milliner and one tanner. The cooper shops had entirely disappeared. In those days insurance agents tacked up little tin signs on the insur-

ed houses, stating the name of the company in which they were insured. There seems to have been a preponderance of lawyers, but it must be remembered that the cost of living was yet extremely low, there was plenty of hunting and fishing, with absolutely no limit to the bag, and almost every family had a garden and a cow, also a pig to be butchered about Thanksgiving Day. With two or three hundred a year in cash a family could get along very well.

The general cheapness of living may be judged by the cost of maintaining the county government, which was a little less than six thousand dollars a year. Out of this came the salaries of the officers, the keeping up of roads, the building of schools and the pay of the teachers, with but little help from the general school fund of the State. The county levy was 80 cents on the hundred dollars, the teachers fund levy in Washington district 26 cents and that of the building fund 16 cents; but the land valuation was exceedingly light—about one hundred dollars an acre for river bottom land and ten dollars for hill land.

Only a few farmers were in fairly well-to-do circumstances. Their average condition was that of actual indigence, many not being able to afford the slightest luxuries or even to buy school books for their children. There was no convenient market for their produce, so there was very little inducement for them to develop their farms. There was still a slight demand for rough staves, and they could still sell tanbark, but there was no real agriculture, except in a few instances. But they were to receive considerable financial help from the building of the railroad.

Parkersburg men were the chief promoters of the enterprise, under the lead of Colonel W. P. Thompson and Senator Johnson N. Camden. In Pleasants county Major Robert H. Browse took an active part, and was so interested that he traveled the entire distance between Wheeling and Parkersburg on foot, helping to secure the right of way and oversee the surveying.

Preliminary surveys were made in 1882. As in the case of building the Baltimore & Ohio railroad from Grafton to Parkersburg, some business men in Marietta

viewed the proposed railroad with jealous eyes, and set on foot again an attempt to construct the railroad on the Ohio side of the river from Marietta to Bellaire. Bernard Rodick of Marietta came even into St. Marys in the Spring of 1882 and attempted to sell stock in the proposed Ohio road. In fact, emissaries on several occasions came to this side of the river and tried to discourage the building of the W. P. & C. road, spreading all sorts of reports, one argument being that the railroad would effectually check the growth of all the smaller towns through which it should pass, as the trains would rush through without stopping, so that people would move to the larger places where the trains would stop.

When the surveyors came to St. Marys the weighty question arose as to how the road should be taken through the town. Already Second street had developed into the main street; it was in a direct line with the survey, but a majority of the citizens objected to permitting its use by the company. The railroad officials professed a desire to comply with the desires of the people, and a sort of unofficial vote was taken, with the result that thirty-one declared in favor of First street, two favored Alley A, five voted for Second street and thirty for Third street.

Major McConnell, in charge of the survey, seemed to be vexed at the indecision of the people and threatened to run the survey at the foot of the hill back of the court house. It is now regretted that he was not permitted to carry out his threat. But at that time the idea was apparently absurd, and almost every citizen raised his voice against it. They did not want the railway station located out in the country. So the town council gave the right to lay a one-track road down the main street.

The residence of W. W. Hall stood on Creel street, exactly blocking the lower end of Second street. From the windows of this house was obtained a clear view of the entire length of the main thoroughfare, and from the porch could be seen all of Creel street. This property was sold to the railroad company, and in 1883 the house was moved to the west side of the track and converted

into a temporary station. Active work on the road was begun in 1883, the firm of Garvey & O'Brien getting the contract for grading and construction from the town up to Bens Run, and Mr. Carey the part south as far as Bull Creek, while Halleck Brothers had the contract for building the bridge.

Employment was offered to any one who was able to handle a pick and shovel, and the opportunity was grasped by quite a number of the residents. At the same time, early in Spring, large gangs of Italians were brought in by the contractors and quartered in shanties along the right of way. These men were accustomed to the work, but the natives soon tired and threw up their jobs.

The incoming of the Italians was the first time many of our people had seen real foreigners, and they aroused considerable interest, especially at night, when the strangers gave themselves up to their chief recreations of singing and playing on accordions. And pay days were always exciting times. The offices of the contractors were on Creel street, and on those occasions that little street was filled with a highly excited and gesticulating mob.

Work progressed so rapidly that on November 27 the track was laid through the town, the inhabitants turning out en masse to witness the event. The bridge was not completed, but in a few days the rails were laid as far as the creek and work trains were running constantly to and from Parkersburg. When the river was closed with ice just before Christmas the Ohio River Railroad, as the road was then officially designated, helped the people out by running box cars to Parkersburg to bring up merchandise and mail.

Besides giving to the farmers and their sons an opportunity to earn money by working on the grading, the road offered an immediate and handy market for cross-ties, which were needed by thousands. Subcontractors were scouring the country, negotiating for their delivery along the right of way. Everywhere the hard pressed farmer was again at work felling trees, sawing and hewing them into ties and hauling them to the river. Winter was spent in making them, and as soon as the roads became passable, which did not often happen then

before the first of May, the work of teaming began. The entire county was busy with this new industry. It was a repetition of the former trade in barrel staves.

Getting out railroad ties was a man's job, but the reward was puerile; at least it would so be considered now. Practically the best timber trees on the farm were sacrificed. The demand was for white oak, burr oak, chestnut oak, or any sort of hard wood, sound and solid, for the ties must have at least eight inches face, from sap to sap, be seven feet long and free of all defects. The farmer took this good timber from his land, peeled off the bark, sawed it into proper length, hewed it to get the proper facing, and then hauled it from five to ten miles to some point on the railroad right of way, and for all this he was paid the munificent sum of thirty cents a tie. From eight to ten ties were hauled at a load, and at the best two trips made a good long day's work with a team. And even then most of the farmer's work was liable to be lost through the system of culling. The inspector might discover defects strange to the eyes of the farmer. In such a case, should the latter reload them upon his wagon and have his weary team haul them back for firewood, or should he leave them at the yard? Often he left them, and perhaps those discarded ties for which he had received nothing, would be used in railroad sidings as "seconds," the subcontractor getting paid for them.

So the railroad helped the farmer to ready cash, and it served the citizens of the town a good turn in rainy weather by affording them a fairly good passage from one end of the town to the other. It was not uncommon to see at one time scores of men and women walking in the center of Second street.

The bridge over Middle Island Creek was completed by the first of December, and tracklaying went on rapidly up the river. Then the work was delayed considerably by a heavy fall of snow, followed by rain, and exceedingly cold weather in the first week of January, when the temperature went down to twelve below zero. Then began the great snow which resulted in the flood of 1884. On January 11 snow in the open fields about town was measured and found to be 32 inches deep. There were

slight thaws, during which the snow settled down, so that it is impossible to state the amount that had fallen up to the time of the general thaw and drizzling rain that set in about the first of February. Some estimated it at about four feet. From the Oracle of February 15 we take the following account:

The Alleghany ice passed this place on Sunday night, the 3rd instant. The river fell about four feet on Monday. Tuesday it began rising rapidly again, and by Wednesday evening it was quite evident that those living on Creel street would have to vacate their homes. On Wednesday morning news came that the water at Pittsburg was thirty feet and rising twelve inches an hour. The unusual snowfall, which was still in the mountains, the mild temperature and the continued rains indicated a flood of unusual magnitude. On Thursday morning at six o'clock the water was crossing Creel street at Kelsall's corner and was still rising at the rate of four inches per hour, and rain was falling.

The high water mark of 1860 had been reached and there was no sign of abatement. Steadily the backwater crawled up Main street and at 11 o'clock a skiff landed at Riggs' corner, an event which had not occurred since 1852. This was the northwest corner of Second and Lafayette streets at the Commercial Hotel.

Still the same report, four inches an hour. By evening every street and alley was under water, and skiffs, johnboats and every available craft that would float were plying to and fro, moving persons and property to places of safety. All the inhabitants of one-story buildings left their houses, and those in two-story buildings moved to the upper floors. Scarcely any one believed that the flood of 1832 would be surpassed, and many refused to leave their residences until the water was actually on the floor with no abatement in the rise. All night of Thursday was spent in anxious wakefulness. Scarcely an eye was closed, for who could sleep when danger threatened both life and property?

All night long anxious men paddled over the streets and alleys, while their still more anxious families watched from the upper windows. "Four inches an hour!" became monotonous. At midnight the cry became "Three

inches an hour!" This, too, in time became monotonous. The water advanced as steadily as before, though not so rapidly, and it was not until six o'clock on Friday evening, February 9. that it was pronounced at a stand. Daylight Saturday morning revealed the fact that a fall of six inches had been made. As the people stood gazing on the receding waters, contemplating the ruin and desolation wrought in their homes, the excitement which for a day or two kept them up gave way to feelings of dismay.

According to old marks the water was three feet and three inches higher than in 1832 at Parkersburg. The former flood was before the existence of St. Marys so no actual comparison could be made here, and in 1884 there were no Government low water marks here. The only guide was the mark set by Halleck Brothers when making the foundation for the railroad bridge in 1883, and the measurement made from that showed the height of the flood here to have been 53 feet two inches, which is probably about correct, as the height at Parkersburg is given at 52.9. Since then Government experts have set a low water mark which is said to be nearly three feet above actual low water.

There was only one spot of ground that was not covered by water, that on which the Episcopal church stands. The water did not quite reach the floors of three buildings—the old M. E. South church, a little dwelling on the opposite side of the street, and a small dwelling on Washington street. The few homes then on the upper terrace were hospitably thrown open to the people, and eighteen families took refuge in the court house. A large gang of Italian laborers took possession of a house belonging to Samuel Barkwill, which stood at the foot of St. Marys hill. He had promised the use of it to some citizens who had been driven out by high water, and when he heard that the foreigners were occupying it, arming himself with a stout stick, he went alone through the night and drove them out.

Several houses on Third street were lifted from their foundations, but not a building was carried off from the town. As in all cases of this kind, the direct losses could not be estimated exactly. The greatest damage to any citizen was that of John Schauwecker, owner of the

tannery, who put his loss at about \$1,500. The merchants were damaged from \$100 to \$500.

Saturday and Sunday were devoted to scrubbing and cleaning. Fortunately the weather was mild, so there was no great suffering. As soon as the waters had subsided a little, the Government sent supplies, and, as usual, a large part went to people who had only seen the water from a safe distance. News of the supply steamer was sent out, and people came from far in the interior to get the free flour, coffee, sugar and bacon.

The Ohio River Railroad Construction Company endured the greatest loss, the road-bed being washed away in many places. The large fill in the lower end of town dissolved like brown sugar as the water rose, and the ties hung suspended to the rails. However, it was said that the thorough soaking would make the road settle to a better foundation, and that was probably true, for in very few places has the company been obliged to make new fills since that flood.

The railroad was completed in June, 1884, and after the syndicate had made a trial trip, it was formally turned over to the Ohio River Railroad Company by the construction company. On June 16 regular passenger service was commenced, before the completion of the telegraph system. Three passenger trains were run daily each way, the time from Parkersburg to Wheeling being four and one-half hours. And from that date our people began more largely to explore the outside world.

The former parlor of the old Hall home was used as a waiting room and one of the small bedrooms was fitted up for a ticket office. William E. Hoyt was the agent, and also served as telegraph operator, freight master and general roustabout. When comment was made upon the multiplicity of his duties, he laughingly said that he had gained some experience on a narrow gauge railroad in Ohio, of which he had been general manager, ticket agent, telegrapher, freight handler and at times conductor or engineer. The express business was then distinct, and was handled by M. P. Prettyman, agent of the Adams Express Company. After a few years Mr. Hoyt was transferred to Ravenswood, and later to Walkersville on the Coal & Coke railroad in Lewis county.