

Roots of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad in Columbus, Ohio

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THE CENTRAL OHIO RAILROAD (1853)

While the railroads west and north of Columbus were being built and opened to traffic, the east was not being neglected inasmuch as another company was busy building a line between Columbus and Bellaire on the Ohio River, almost opposite the important city of Wheeling. This line was to be even more important than the two roads which already had entered Columbus inasmuch as it would connect Ohio's capital by rail with the Atlantic seaboard cities and with the nation's capital. This company, named the Central Ohio Railroad, received its charter in February, 1847, after promotional work which originated in Zanesville.

Construction work was slowed considerably by natural obstacles such as the crossing of the Muskingum River at Zanesville, and the excavating at the Black Hand Gorge of the Licking River between Zanesville and Newark, where it was necessary to remove solid rock for a distance of seven hundred feet and as deep as sixty five feet. Other sections required tremendous amounts of fill and trestle work, such as the crossing of the Big Walnut Creek and its flats east of present Port Columbus. The sections between Zanesville and Bellaire required a half dozen tunnels, about a dozen sizable bridges to a dozen miles of track, deep rocky cuts, and long high fills. A troublesome landslide was encountered near Barnesville, and equally troublesome rock falls in the Cambridge Tunnel made it necessary to make an open cut of half the proposed length of the tunnel before it could be arched. All these circumstances delayed completion.

Finally, the road was opened to traffic between Zanesville and Newark in January, 1852; between Newark and Columbus in January, 1853; and between Zanesville and Bellaire in November, 1854. The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad had completed its road from Baltimore thru Pittsburgh to Wheeling in 1852, so the new Central Ohio Railroad afforded thru rail service, except for the Ohio River crossing, for freight and passengers to Wheeling, Pittsburgh, Cumberland, Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York City.

The Central Ohio Railroad entered Columbus from the east, passing what is now Port Columbus and the Army Reserve Depot, crossing Alum Creek and Nelson Road south of Fifth Avenue, and continuing westward to a point north of the Columbus Barracks where it swung southwestward to enter the depot of the roads from Xenia and Cleveland. This was the third railroad

to enter Columbus.

Although opened to traffic, the new railroad was severely troubled. Its unballasted roadbed caused numerous derailments, damage to rolling stock, and disruption to schedules. Its lack of adequate passing sidings caused additional lateness of trains. Its rolling stock was insufficient to handle the business offered, and proper facilities for maintenance and repairs were not available. Consequently the road soon went into disrepute. It seemed impossible to correct the condition - for financial reasons. Construction and equipment costs were almost double the estimates, the company was under-capitalized for such a situation, a large floating debt was contracted, and failure to pay its obligations at maturity caused many complaints.

The road struggled along, paying indebtedness here and there from its revenue income, until 1857, when it went into receivership. The Baltimore & Ohio acquired an interest in the road and supported its operation during the Civil War. It remained in this condition until December, 1865, during which time its revenue increased quite substantially, much of the increase being the result of material transported during the war.

In November, 1866, the property was leased to the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, which immediately started a program of improvements on its new property, including the construction of a stone and steel bridge across the Ohio River at Bellaire, which was opened in 1871. The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad [in 1952] still operates this road between Columbus and the Ohio River, although its operation between Columbus and Newark is shared by the Pennsylvania Railroad, as we shall read later.

THE COLUMBUS & CINCINNATI MIDLAND RAILROAD (1884)

In 1884, a railroad known as the Columbus & Cincinnati Midland was completed and opened to traffic between the west side of Columbus and the town of Midland which is located in Clinton County forty-five miles east of Cincinnati. The new road connected at Midland with the Parkersburg-Cincinnati line of the Baltimore & Ohio.

Construction of the Midland route was sponsored by the Baltimore & Ohio which assumed operation of the new line shortly after its completion. Inasmuch as the Baltimore & Ohio already was operating a line from Pittsburgh to Columbus, the new road provided the pioneer line with a thru route from Pittsburgh thru Columbus and Midland to Cincinnati. Incidentally this was the third road to operate between Columbus and Cincinnati, the other two being the Little Miami and the Big Four Route.

The Columbus & Cincinnati Midland entered Columbus thru Washington Court House and Grove City, passing northward across the west side flats parallel to Glenwood Avenue until it connected with the Big Four tracks, over which trackage rights were acquired into the union depot area where it connected with the Baltimore & Ohio tracks eastward.

The Columbus & Cincinnati Midland was the twelfth road to join the Columbus group, and Columbus was being recognized as one of the important rail centers of the nation.

* Text taken from *Columbus Railroads* by Rowlee Steiner, 1952, an unpublished manuscript.