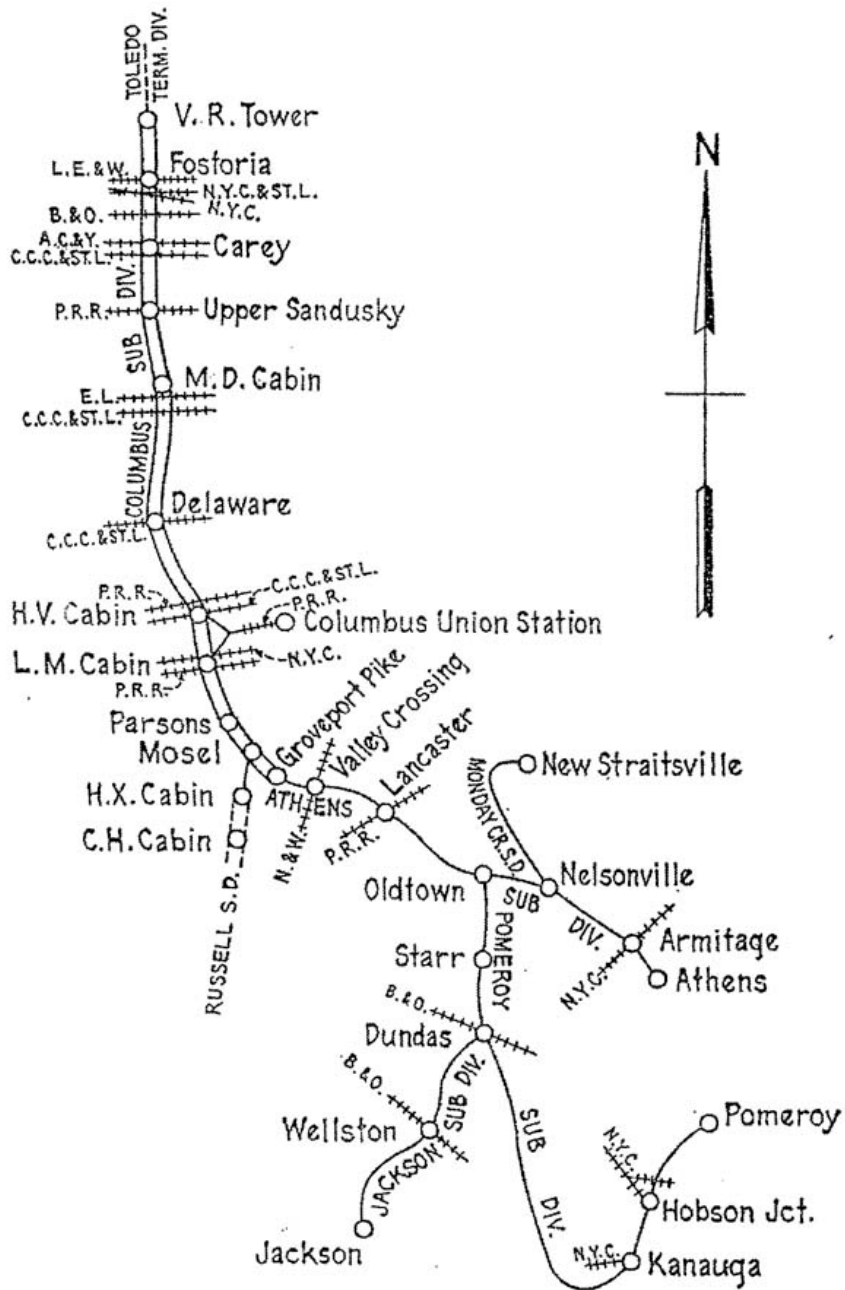


# **A Spring Afternoon Detour on the C&O Athens Subdivision - 1970**

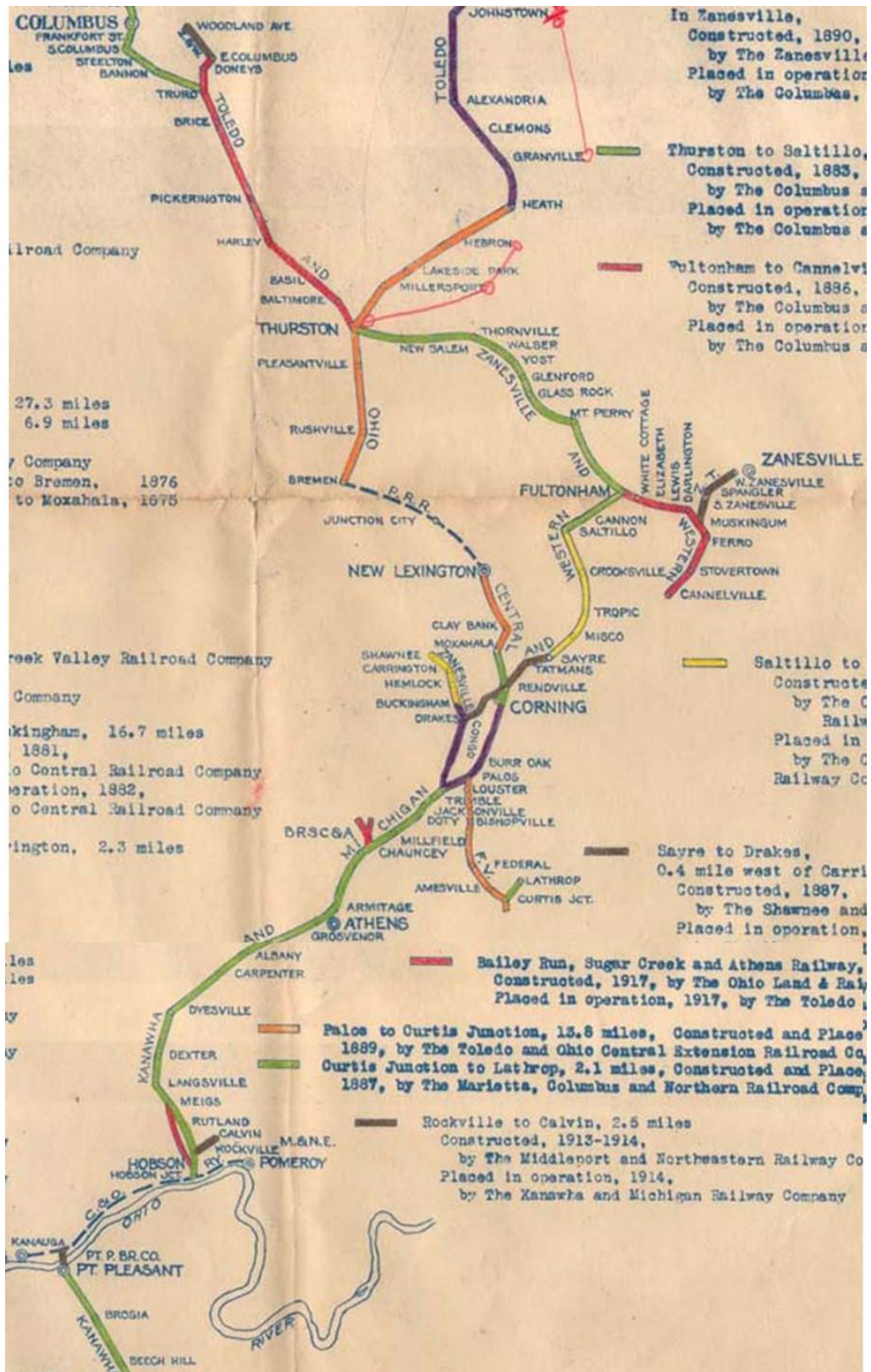
by James M. Cavanaugh

Published 2015

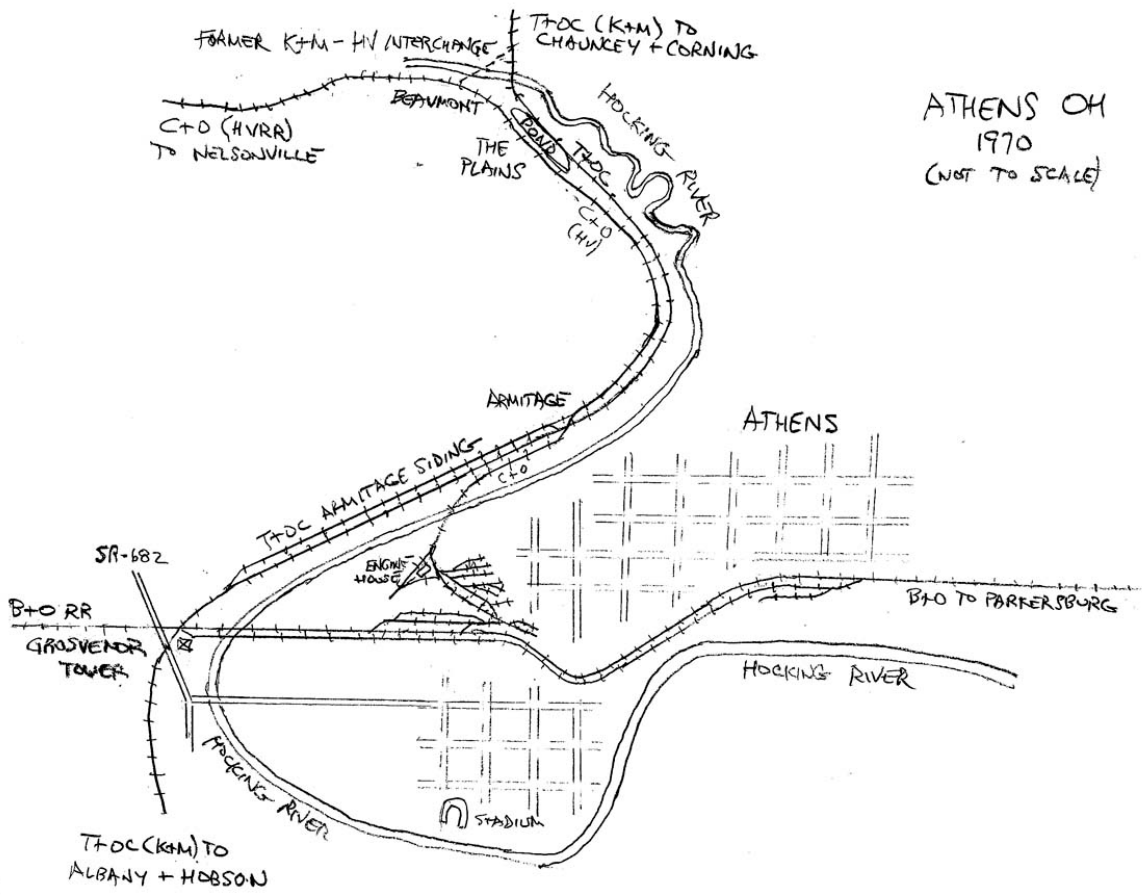
# HOCKING DIVISION



C&O Timetable - 1966



Toledo & Ohio Central - 1932



## A Spring Afternoon Detour on the C&O Athens Subdivision - 1970

by James M. Cavanaugh



On the Toledo & Ohio Central where I worked as a brakeman in the late 1960s, our trains occasionally were diverted onto the parallel C&O Hocking Valley line that crisscrossed our tracks in six places between Toledo and the Ohio River. These detours, which came without much advance notice, could arise from a short maintenance outage of our line, or a wreck, washout, tunnel or cut cave in, or more rarely, just from extreme traffic congestion on the T&OC.

The New York Central's T&OC "South End" ran from West Columbus Yard, and by 1970 from Buckeye Yard, down to Hobson on the Ohio River near Middleport. This was a 125-mile long moderately heavy haulage single-track line, made up of a patchwork of six different historical railroads. The T&OC zigzagged east through Truro to Thurston, south to Bremen, east on the Pennsylvania Railroad's Cincinnati & Muskingum Valley line to New Lexington, then back onto the T&OC south through Corning onto the former Kanawha & Michigan Railroad, swinging around the west edge of Athens, and then on to our southern interchange with the C&O at Hobson. From Hobson, our line ran west over the C&O's Pomeroy Subdivision for nine miles to Kanauga, just east of Gallipolis, where the T&OC branched off at a switch with east-facing points onto the massive K&M Ohio River Bridge to Point Pleasant, West Virginia.

The neighboring C&O Athens Subdivision connected Parsons Yard in South Columbus with an interchange onto the B&O main line at West Athens, running much more directly between the two cities on a 70-mile right-of-way through Valley Crossing, Groveport, Canal Winchester, Carroll, Lancaster, Sugar Grove, Logan and Nelsonville. The C&O crossed and maintained an interchange track with the T&OC at Armitage (T&OC Southern Branch milepost 21.4), in the deep woods on the west bank of the Hocking River on the outer curve of an oxbow opposite Athens. The C&O referred to us as the "K&M" at that location, based on the railroad's original name there. The C&O considered the direction from Columbus to Athens to be "east," with Athens to Columbus being "west."

C&O Hocking Valley subdivisions, distances and mileposts can be confusing. The C&O between Columbus and Athens was originally designated as a single subdivision, shown in the C&O's 1958 Employee Timetable as running 69.6 miles from Mosel, just south of Parsons Yard in South Columbus, to Athens. By 1966, the C&O ETT listed the Athens Subdivision as ending at Oldtown just east of Logan (C&O Milepost 51.1 - distance from Maple Street at Yard "A"), with the track south of Oldtown designated as the Armitage Subdivision, ending at Armitage, although the remaining 1.6 miles over to Athens and the C&O Freight House there was still in service. By the mid-1970s, the ETTs showed the Armitage Subdivision ending at "Diamond," a brickworks 2.7 miles east of Haydenville. The C&O track east of Diamond was still in service to Athens, occasionally called by their Nelsonville Turn, and the C&O ETTs still had operating rules for pick-ups and drops over on our NYC tracks at Armitage.

Running south toward Hobson on our T&OC, the single-track C&O came into view from the west just south of Chauncey at The Plains, a quiet settlement along the Hocking. In the distant past there was a connection track here between Beaumont on the C&O and T&OC near its one bridge across the Hocking. This interchange gave the Hocking Valley access to the massive Sunday Creek coal traffic then flowing into the K&M yard a mile north at Chauncey. The connection likely gave the K&M an alternate outlet to Columbus and Northern Ohio for its coal and West Virginia traffic in the days before it had better affiliations north of Corning. From The Plains, our tracks ran parallel with theirs southeasterly for several miles and, curving gradually toward the south and then back to the west following the alluvial meanderings of the Hocking channel. Between these tracks in the cool, damp valley framed by a dense forest of white oak and hickory, there was a narrow pond retained by the T&OC's embankment between the C&O tracks and the river. Its clear waters looked so inviting for a swim on a hot day, and there was always a square-ended fishing boat resting bottom-up on a pile of thick green honeysuckle vines on the north end. But in years of passing this pleasant shady place I never once saw a soul there.

The "business end" of Armitage lay a mile farther south at the point where the two tracks had swung nearly 180 degrees around the Hocking River oxbow back to the west, emerging from the woods, there having a view of the river with Athens laying due south on the far side. Here the C&O crossed over the NYC at about a 20-degree angle, and then after running a quarter mile southwest parallel to the T&OC but now on the opposite side, the C&O cut south diagonally across the river on a three-span open-top girder bridge and on into Athens to its southern terminal turning wye and interconnection to the B&O's Cincinnati main line. (The B&O and C&O had affiliated a few years before.) At Armitage, a lonely automatic interlocking with no tower or operator, the railroads had an interchange connecting the C&O just east (north) of the diamond with the north end of our 125-car Armitage Siding (which lay to the west of the T&OC main). The interchange track had north-facing points on the C&O and south-facing points in our passing track, allowing a northbound T&OC train to proceed west onto the C&O. There was also a second interchange track to the south of the diamond allowing a southbound T&OC train to proceed onto the C&O and into Athens.

The T&OC timetable listed "Athens" as a station on our line (Southern Branch MP 22.1, 0.7 miles south of Armitage, near the point where the C&O angled across the Hocking). Our line was on the opposite shore of the Hocking River from Athens at that point, with no bridge across to the city, and no visible station or siding. However, in our passenger train days, which ended in the 1950s, the NYC had trackage rights over the C&O into Athens and so Athens was still a timetable "station" for us.

When rolling north up this flat stretch of the T&OC, thinking of the hard work to come getting up over Moxahala and New Lexington hills and snaking all over creation to cover the 85 miles remaining to West Columbus (or 90 to Buckeye), I often fantasized about what it would be like to cut through this interchange with no stop, and roll up the nearly water-level C&O Hocking Valley route, a mere 65 miles or so to Frankfort Street Tower. There a

train could cut through the crossover back onto the NYC, barely even slowing down, and run the last few level miles to West Columbus or Buckeye.

Without warning, I got my chance to do exactly this one bright Sunday in late March, 1970.

On a Friday, I had called the yard office to “mark up” on the T&OC extra board, and crew dispatcher Mr. Quivey told me I would likely get out on CN-2 southbound after dark. I never became an “extra board sharpshooter” like some who could always seem to hit the most lucrative assignments, but I was good enough.

I met up with the rest of the crew at Buckeye Yard in the early morning hours. Our conductor, I was most pleased to see, was John Hargis. John was the paragon of a T&OC railroader, maybe in his mid-50s, friendly and courteous to a fault, well-spoken and moderately talkative. Most interesting to me, he was a walking archive of the railroad’s workings, history and stories about the people who worked there, and how it changed over the years. He was always happy to chat about those subjects as long as you liked. The third member of the train crew was a career Pennsylvania RR man named Gilg, a nice fellow in his 40s who was keeping his trips up by marking up on our line during a slower period over on the Panhandle. As the “regular” on the T&OC I seemed to rank the visiting Gilg, so he took the head end and I boarded the caboose as flagman under Mr. Hargis’ command.

We had a pleasant but unremarkable daytime run down the South End on CN-2, which as always had plenty of power for the hills and no intermediate set offs or pick-ups, just through “overhead” cars bound for central West Virginia. The legendary T&OC south end grades, in particular New Lexington and Moxahala hills just north of Corning (Milepost 197 on the Western Branch and MP 0 on the Southern Branch) were far tougher in the northbound direction. Our trains carried heavier loads northbound than southbound, so the road was always balancing power with at least one extra locomotive unit than needed on each southbound train. Albany hill (MP 32.6 on the Southern Branch), seemed to be steeper southbound, but it was little challenge for mixed freights with adequate horsepower. During the run down, we had some good coffee and nice apples Mr. H had from a farm near his place. He gave a neatly detailed account of the days when the old Federal Valley Railroad interconnected with the K&M at Palos, on the north side of Glouster. We got into Hobson in the late afternoon. After a ride downtown in the usual NYC green Chevy Suburban, we had a bite to eat at the diner (1,500 calories of burgers, fries, milkshake and coffee there would set you back about \$1.95). I turned in at the old brick Lafayette Hotel in Middleport that the NYC used for crew rest.

Next morning we got our call for NT-5 north scheduled to report early, just at daybreak. The usual routine at Hobson Yard was that the crew van from the hotel pulled up in front of the gray wooden yard office at the north end, and the conductor stepped inside to get the train orders and any other details needed for departure. There was no engine house remaining in service there, so trains arriving from Charleston or Dickinson Yard in West Virginia not doing a live hand-off to a waiting northbound crew typically left the locomotive consist uncoupled but next to the train at the north switch of a track in one of the two small sections remaining of this once busy yard. The conductor picked up our orders, which



would read something like "C&E NT-5 engine 6096 (six-zero-nine-six) run extra Hobson to Corning". Then our van would take the engineer, fireman and head brakeman to the locomotive, and run the rear-end crew down as near as he could get to the caboose at the south end of the yard. I recall looking down the tracks and seeing our power on the head end -- a classic older F9 EMD "covered wagon" in sooty PRR black and Tuscan red livery in the lead, followed by two newer EMD GP 35s with NYC markings. We would have about 6,500 horsepower, abundant muscle to move our 3,800-ton 80-car train of mixed freight.

Mr. Hargis emerged from the yard office as usual, with no sign of anything being up, but once in the car he said: "We're going C&O up at Armitage." It took me a moment to grasp it, but excitement built (for me, at least) as we bounced over the potholes and washboard rough surface of the oily gravel access road toward the caboose.

We got underway immediately after our air test, the norm for Hobson in the mornings, which saw few departure delays waiting for conflicting moves down the line from Columbus. Most probably they did not call our crew for duty until the dispatcher knew we could get right out. That way they would not use up our hours, causing us to get more overtime pay or even "violate" at the end of the shift by reaching our 16-hour legal maximum work day. By then the Penn Central, successor to the T&OC and NYC, was stumbling toward bankruptcy and deferring track maintenance badly, resulting in so many slow orders north of Corning that sometimes it took all day to "run" up this line.

We ran the 35 miles from Hobson (Southern MP 56) up to the B&O crossing at Grosvenor (T&OC Southern Branch MP 23.2) at maximum allowed track speed of 30 mph without stopping. Our long-framed green NYC caboose glided smoothly over the bolted rails, with the slack slamming in against the train a few times around Albany. After a stop at the B&O crossing protected by the scruffy looking little two-story Grosvenor Tower, we pulled forward slowly up into Armitage Siding. Mr. H said we would meet C&O "pilots" here -- an engineer for the head end and conductor for the rear -- and once they were aboard we would pull ahead through the interchange track out onto the C&O and head north.

It was a warmish late spring day in March, without a cloud in the sky and no breeze to mention, probably in the low-40s, very pleasant in a coat without need for gloves. But it had been cold, and there was as yet no sign of new plant life emerging, no leaves budding out and no yellow crocuses on the lawns of houses along the line, the surest evidence of official spring arrival in Southern Ohio. With nothing green to be seen, the bright landscape was all grays and browns, with bare branches and tree trunks abounding, and deep wet piles of last autumn's fallen leaves matted down by recently melted snows.

Our C&O pilots arrived, having picked up their train orders somewhere, possibly up at their Oldtown train dispatcher's office just east of Logan. The pilot conductor, a quiet man, went over things with us a bit, and there was little to say as Mr. Hargis had done this before a number of times. The pilot sat down at the desk to the right of the center aisle of our NYC cabin car to make out his paperwork, and remained there for the entire journey to Columbus, except for a couple chats with us about common acquaintances and brief trips out to the back platform to return a highball from operators up at Oldtown and Lancaster.



With a sense of great anticipation during our 90-minute wait for the pilots, I had scouted around for the best vantage point to see this railroad I had longed to visit for some years. The bay window by the left-hand seat where the flagman normally sat was so filthy on the outside as to make the viewing difficult. I checked the rear-facing cushion seat in the back of the cabin, which offered a nice view aft with a clean window on the side. But I had learned you really cannot see well and take in a railroad by looking at it receding behind; you have to be looking forward. There was a possible view from the bunks up front, but it was awkward and obstructed by the covered hopper immediately ahead of the cabin car. I considered riding the rear platform and looking out side to side, but decided Mr. Hargis would not like that (rightfully so from a safety standpoint). Fine to visit out there to snag train orders, but get back inside right after. So it was to be the flagman's seat but riding up on one knee with my head up by the open window so I could look out unobstructed, like the engine crews used to do on the steam locomotives.

Finally there came the familiar and exciting sound of two horn blasts way ahead in the distance, followed in 15 seconds by the rumble of the slack being taken up by the locomotive. With a little jerk, we were underway up the curving track as our train pulled through the interchange onto the Hocking Valley rails. I assumed I would have to jump off and throw both of the switches on the interchange back to their normal alignment for the T&OC tracks. But the pilot told me not to worry because the C&O trainmaster who drove them out to Armitage would take care of it. Just in case Mr. Hargis and I went out to the platform, and I was down on the bottom step ready to run for it. If the engineer knew his stuff, he could pull the rear end through a siding switch so slowly that even an arthritic veteran railroader would have time to dismount, throw a switch, replace the lock and run along side and catch the rear grab iron to get back on. However, to do two switches maybe 200 feet apart would take some quick work. Having just turned 21 years of age, I was your man for that. But as promised the C&O man was there on the ground, and highballed us through with a big envelope full of papers in his hand. A good thing, as our hogger, knowing I would not need to jump off and catch back up, was moving a bit quickly.

Once out on the C&O main, we quickly got up to track speed, here 25-30 miles per hour from the Armitage diamond to Oldtown and then to Parsons Yard, as shown in the C&O timetable, with only a couple slow spots in downtown Lancaster. With a comfortable excess of power, we would have no trouble. I had always heard this railroad followed the route of the old Hocking Canal, and was almost dead level, and this proved to be the case. (Jim Evans kindly furnished a copy of the C&O Hocking Division Track Charts, which show the controlling grade westbound to Columbus being one very short 0.38% stretch just east of Nelsonville, with the heaviest slope eastbound to Athens being a brief 0.80% stretch at Carroll.) I don't recall the slack ever running in hard, which suggested an absence of grades plus smooth handling by the C&O pilot engineer. I assumed the C&O engine man had probably not worked on a covered wagon in years, and our PRR F9 looked like a real fossil.

The track here, as we veered to the west away from the parallel T&OC at The Plains, ran through dense woods, with little to see at this time of year. The first discernible landmark was an old white station marker post that read "Poston". There appeared to be an old

passenger landing here, on a small brick or cobble-paved platform, with the sides of the right-of-way lined with vertical walls of encroaching woods all overgrown with honeysuckle vines, but no station building. The C&O timetable showed Poston as a station 7.1 miles up from Armitage, although an 1890s Ohio Railways map I found recently showed Poston as a place some miles off to the east reached by a forking branch line from a place on the CHVRR called Hocking, which seems to be about at the location of the "Poston" which we passed that day. (I think that track might have been the Sugar Creek Subdivision of the HVRR, originally known as the Athens, Amesville & Chauncey Railway, built by coal interests around 1907-8 but which never reached any of those cities. It merged into the HVRR in 1911, and was abandoned in 1939.) American Electric Power Co. has an area here designated on contemporary "Athens County Public Lands" conservation maps as the "AEP Poston Station Lands", but it appears to refer to a Poston power generation station, which sat nearby until 2012. Even by 1970, Poston, if it existed, seemed to be a forlorn and forgotten place. There appear to have been several HVRR stations along here, though, with the evocative names of Barron, Hamley's Run, Glen Ebon and Floodwood, shown on an 1898 map now available on the Ohio Railway Stations Database (web link attached below). But by 1970 traffic must have faded away, and I saw no trace of them in the timetables or any sidings or structures in reality along the track.

Other than being aware that the Hocking Valley took its name from the local geographical feature, and that it was an old line following the canal's original route, I did not know much about its history. The Rowlee Steiner manuscript on the Columbus Railroads website indicates the CHVRR was completed from Columbus to Lancaster by 1869 and to Athens in 1870, thus making this line about ten years older than the T&OC's southern extension. On the Columbus Railroads site there is a very old map, reporting a Benjamin Latrobe survey from July and August 1854, showing a railroad over much of the current Hocking Valley right of way, near the canal. This does not follow the actual route of the C&O line, and is on the opposite shore of the Hocking for some of the route. I assume the survey was for a proposed route, some of which was followed and some of which was not.

After a few more curving miles we came onto a straight tangent and rolled over a through truss bridge across the Hocking into Nelsonville. When I looked back at the bridge through the rear window of the caboose, I was surprised to see that it was a wide double-track frame. It seems the Athens Subdivision was long ago a double track line for much of its length, from the K&M interchange at Beaumont to East Clayton, about three miles west of Nelsonville, and from Oldtown to Enterprise and parts from Lancaster to Columbus.

Nelsonville appeared to boast at least a few active rail shippers. There were several switching leads parallel to the main, which was still double-tracked from the bridge all the way through town. I saw a bigger yard layout just to the north along the Monday Creek Subdivision, which veered off eastward to our right from a switch with west-facing points. We moved west past an abandoned brick machine shop and ten-bay segment of a steam engine roundhouse, and then beneath an old coaling tower, and past a weed-covered turning wye off to the right (north). I have more recently found photos and even a postcard of the Nelsonville roundhouse, which stood between the HV main track and the Monday Creek Subdivision just east of the switch. (See links attached at the end of this article.)

The C&O maintained a yard crew at Nelsonville in the 1970s. The 20-mile HV Monday Creek Subdivision passed through the yard just east of the roundhouse, past a yard hump and pull out track, then looped sharply off to the north and east across Route 33, and then back northwesterly to New Straitsville, also connecting to a short link of the abandoned HV Straitsville branch that formerly joined the C&O main track up at Logan. Built in the 1870s, the HV Monday Creek branch ran through Snow Fork Junction into a honeycomb of tracks spreading through the coal-rich hollows of Hocking, Athens and Perry Counties. These included the Snow Fork Subdivision up through Buchtel to Orbiston, with one branch from there through Jobs and Consol to New Pittsburg, and another through Murray City to Coalgate, and farther up, the short Brush Fork, Sand Run and Lost Run Subdivisions, built in 1880s. All these except for the Snow Fork Subdivision were abandoned in 1937-1940.

A detailed rail map from 1898 shows that at its northern terminus, the Monday Creek line, via the HV Straitsville Branch, interconnected with the B&O's former Newark, Somerset & Straitsville line at McCuneville, linking via the B&O to the former Zanesville & Western's line at Shawnee, and thence at Drakes to the T&OC Buckingham Branch to Glouster. The Z&W ran eastward through Congo via a tunnel into Corning and then turned north up Sunday Creek toward Zanesville. However, several sources I have more recently checked, including the very knowledgeable Jim Evans, said the C&O did not connect all the way to the B&O, with New Straitsville and Shawnee being separated by a high ridge. A 1914 railroad map on the Ohio PUC site indicates no rail line linking New Straitsville and McCuneville. But it shows four active coalmines arrayed in a straight line between the two towns. Possibly the connection to the B&O, if it existed, consisted of industrial switching tracks that were pulled up when the mines closed.

This network of mine-town lines had produced a steady flow of steam coal traffic and returning empty hopper movements from the 1880s through the 1930s. A 1939 diagram of the Nelsonville yard along the Monday Creek line (see web link at the end of this article) showed five tracks with maximum capacity for 416 empties and "heavy side" tracks for up to 675 outbound loads. The traffic volume and number of train movements was evidenced by the presence of the C&O roundhouse and shops at Nelsonville and another ten-bay roundhouse that stood not 12 miles up the line at the east end of the big yard at Oldtown. The HV must have been servicing 20-30 engines a day here to support the yard jobs, mine runs, local passenger and freight trains and through trains between Athens and Columbus.

That base of activity, and related hostlers, shop and yard labor and clerical workers, right-of-way maintenance crews, engine and train crews, switch tenders, station and freight house staffing, freight agents, operators and signalmen would have sustained many hundreds of jobs, and of course the mines were a huge employer. Before World War II, the coal seams here began to "play out" as the local people described it. The deep mines gave way in some cases to big strip mining projects like the Peabody mine up at Claybank on the T&OC line, which produced 350 weekly hopper loads but not so many jobs. People were already badly hurting economically by the late 1960s, speaking longingly of the days of their youth. The Z&W Corning line had disappeared years before. The C&O, B&O and T&OC/NYC lines through these Appalachian hollows appeared to have been abandoned for

the most part by the end of the 1960s, although I recall going up the T&OC Buckingham Branch once in 1968 to pick up hoppers.

The HV Monday Creek Subdivision still showed up as an active line in C&O timetables into the early 1970s. The C&O was servicing this area with its Nelsonville Turn, pulled by sure-footed GP9s, which could navigate the lighter tracks up the branches. But the coal east of Oldtown was long gone and other local traffic was clearly scarce and declining. The Athens Subdivision main line also had seen its high point 40 years previously. There were still smaller brick and tile works, but many more manufacturers and mineral commodities shippers along here had been shuttered. Old C&O track charts show five shipper service tracks between Armitage and Nelsonville and eight between Nelsonville and Oldtown, but I noted only one active switching point east of Nelsonville at Diamond (Kimberly) and perhaps two or three between Nelsonville and Logan. Unlike the T&OC, which reached a cluster of big industrial shippers down in West Virginia producing more than enough overhead traffic to make the line remunerative, the CHVRR ended in a weed-grown freight house track down in Athens, with no shippers in sight. Tellingly, the pilot conductor mentioned the double track had been pulled up three decades before. The once traffic-rich eastern reaches of this elegantly engineered little railroad were slowly starving to death.

A ways up past the coaling tower and a turning wye into Nelsonville stood the site of the former HV station, razed by the 1970s to make way for an industrial building. Later the Hocking Valley Scenic Railroad built a replica of a different C&O station here, a typical gray wood frame 19<sup>th</sup> century Ohio depot with overhanging eaves.

North of Nelsonville, the CHVRR turned more westerly, following gentle curves of the Hocking River, running past Haydenville (MP56.2). On the opposite side of Route 33 off to the right were neat rows of bungalows with southern-exposure front porches packed with furniture and idle flower pots, boasting rows of last summer's withered tomato plants in the narrow gaps in between the structures where they could catch afternoon sun. I imagined these would mostly be miners' (or former miners') houses. Some were built of large light brown pyrobar bricks that I recognized from some construction in Columbus and the Ludowici kilns over on the T&OC around New Lexington. Those porches would be inviting on a hot summer day, with the radio tuned to a ball game and iced tea with lemons, and maybe some of those tomatoes, but not on this chilly afternoon.

As our train approached Logan (MP 49.8), we passed the Oldtown rail junction (MP 51.1 in the C&O timetable). Oldtown reputedly got its name from being a regular camping ground of the Huron and Wyandot Indian tribes. Here I saw the C&O's Pomeroy Subdivision branching off to the southwest from a point near a big industrial plant (which from its shape looked like a glass works). That line, known to T&OC crews as the "River Division" from its name in older C&O timetables, extended down through Vinton County and McArthur to Gallipolis on the Ohio River, with a branch at Dundas off to Jackson and Wellston. At Gallipolis the railroad turned east running up along the north bank of the River to Pomeroy, a very indirect 81.7 miles from Oldtown. The last four miles from Middleport through Pomeroy to Forrest Run (MP 132-136 from Columbus) were technically the Pomeroy Belt RR, with the C&O main line ending at MP 132. As noted

above, our T&OC line had running powers over a nine-mile segment of this C&O track from Hobson to Kanauga.

The Pomeroy Subdivision was occasionally also used by detouring T&OC West Virginia trains, as it led directly to Kanauga Junction, just east of Gallipolis, where a diverted train could reach the K&M Ohio River Bridge across to Charleston, Dickinson and the south. However, the Pomeroy Subdivision was not ideal because of multiple steep grades that required doubling of hills. The southbound slope between Union Furnace and Starr in particular was three miles long, and much of it was at 1.4 percent, far steeper than anything our line had to offer. (Moxie Hill was a bit shorter and topped out at 1.2 percent.) T&OC trains moving in either direction would also have to reverse directions off the C&O at Kanauga, involving a time-consuming move to run around the train and drop the caboose back onto the other end. However, if the T&OC were blocked between Hobson and Armitage, the River Branch was our only detour alternative. Mr. Hargis mentioned this line was in really bad shape and could no longer accommodate big through trains.

At Oldtown the line passed through a big but little-used yard off to our right (north). I was told had a roundhouse dating from 1881, with five of its ten stalls lengthened in the 1930s to accommodate bigger 2-10-2 Santa Fe engines acquired by the C&O to supplement its 2-8-2 mikados and 2-8-0 consolidations, but it had been removed in the 1950s when the diesels arrived. Then up toward downtown Logan line passed another wye branching off to the northeast toward Perry County. This was the 12.7-mile Straitsville branch up through Gore to Monday Creek (connecting there to the HV Monday Creek loop back east and south to Nelsonville), and to the northeast to New Straitsville. It had been abandoned decades before just north of a few active shipping points within the Logan city limits.

Leaving Logan, our train followed the CHVRR's long sweeping curves through now open farmland, leaving the forests of the mining country behind. The Hocking River, up here more of a large creek, snaked back and forth along its alluvial course lined with lavish growths of willows and boxelders standing leafless in the winter sunshine. On the left-hand curves, from the flagman's side cabin car window, I could see the whole train stretched out ahead to the locomotives, rolling through the smooth contours of the Hocking Valley.

Riding the caboose was hardly "work," it was so leisurely on the C&O with its lack of grades, and with no local car pickups or drops. The caboose drifted along steadily on the pull of the drawbar ahead, with the slack never running in or out more than a gentle car length or two. In contrast, over on the T&OC south of Columbus, with its endless succession of "he man" hills, heaving up and over ridge after ridge and around tight curves, the cabin car would constantly slam in hard against the train, and then just as quickly get yanked out violently as the train mounted the next rise. For those not familiar, a slack run-in has about the same effect as sitting in a car being hit by a dump truck going about five miles per hour. The T&OC figuratively (and literally if you were not careful) would knock your teeth out.

Northwest of Logan, the HV line ran along the old canal remnants and US 33 through Sugar Grove (MP 38.4). We kept up a steady but leisurely 25-30 miles per hour, with no

perceptible grades or opposing traffic. The right of way and structures here continued to indicate this had been double track line.

Next came Lancaster (MP 31.6), a town very familiar to me from my limited travels as a young resident of East Columbus. As the C&O line ran into the fringes of its urban area from the Southeast, we swung over a diamond crossing the Penn Central's former Pennsylvania Railroad Zanesville line, originally the Cincinnati and Muskingum Valley RR that continued on east and north to the Dresden branch of the CA&C. (That line, just to the east between Bremen and New Lexington, was also the "sheepshank" portion of the T&OC route from Columbus to Hobson.) C&O trains had to make a safety stop before proceeding over the diamond here. After crossing the PRR, the single track HV line turned sharply left and ran due west parallel and adjacent to the PRR for a mile or so through the city. There was active industry here, with several team tracks and maybe a half-dozen shippers with rail connections. Lancaster, headquarters of Anchor-Hocking, always seemed to me like a town with successful business, changing over time but not drying up like the coal country. The tracks ran past the C&O Freight House on the north side, and passed an abandoned four-stall PRR engine house near High Street to the south of the small PRR yard,. Our train slowed as the head end passed over a five-way street crossing where Perry, Broad and Columbus Streets intersect, then accelerated as the HV curved under Memorial Drive overpass. The PRR disappeared off to the west and C&O swung northwest across what I think was the old Hocking Canal right of way toward Columbus.

Leaving Lancaster, the HV line resumed its rural look and feel, following the course of the river and canal traces along Route 33. The line ran through Carroll, where the old Hocking Canal had intersected the Ohio & Erie Canal, and then followed that canal right-of-way through Lockville into Canal Winchester (MP 16.0). Here sat a well-preserved octagonal station structure and the historical wooden O.P. Chaney elevator. I did not give Canal Winchester a lot of thought that day. But 37 winters later I found myself again there, sitting with our family at my 88 year old mother's bedside in her final hours at a hospice a few blocks from the C&O. As that inevitable scene unfolded peacefully, I took a walk to get some relief from the sadness and terror of losing her. Semi-consciously being drawn toward the sound of a locomotive horn not far off, I soon found myself up at the High Street grade crossing watching a grey-liveried local GP9 with a couple trainmen in coveralls out on the ground switching a handful of boxcars at warehouses. It was a soothing moment, thinking back to my one ride on this line, that helped me get myself together to go back and wait out the end with Mom, Dad, brothers and sister, and my own wife and children.

Keeping up its steady 30 miles per hour, NT-5 rolled across Gender Road through Groveport, curving around to the north a little, and across Hamilton Road. The far eastern perimeter of the Columbus urban sprawl was just reaching here in the late 1960s, but there were still farms to the south. I tried to see where we were in relation to the Groveport Golf Club, just a few years before the home course for our high school golf team. Lots of pleasant rounds there with best friends, learning a bit about hitting the ball and lining up putts, and a lot about life, from Coach Joe Rath, Sr.

I knew enough geography of the area to expect Valley Crossing (MP 7.5) to come up soon, and it did, with our train steadily pulling across the N&W's double track main at a 30-degree angle. Like our T&OC crossing of the N&W at Bannan a mile or so to the north, the C&O had an interchange with the N&W here, controlled by HX Cabin. The interlocking was busy with headlights showing on both sides waiting for our train to clear the circuit.

Passing Mosel (MP 6.6), the demarcation line between the CHVRR's Athens Subdivision and the Toledo Subdivision to the north, we slowed to about 15 miles an hour to enter the C&O's mighty Parsons Yard. In the early days of the CHVRR the road had its base of operations up at Mound Street Yard, a 900-car facility near downtown Columbus, with a 30-stall roundhouse and shops crowded into a smallish site just north of the T&OC's Frankfort Street Tower, plus a 500-car yard at South Columbus. But that gave way to the giant 4,900-car Parsons facility, with a 27-stall engine house and 115-foot turntable, around 1930 when the railroad established its direct link with the bulk of the C&O system via its newly-constructed southern main line down through Portsmouth. That railroad replaced a lease arrangement between the C&O and N&W that allowed the former's traffic to run over the N&W from Waverly to Columbus. The C&O crossed the Ohio River at Sciotoville to Russell, Kentucky and beyond to West Virginia and the tidewater ports of Virginia some 500 miles distant.

I hoped to get a view of Parsons in operation, but it seemed a bit quiet this Sunday now in the late afternoon. I could not see much from the flagman's window, nearly flush up against the high boxcars in the adjoining track, so I went out on the rear platform to try my luck there. I wished I had taken the head end for this trip, getting a better view and letting Mr. Gilg relax in the cabin car.

I heard the air go on a bit, and the slack ran in notably for only the second or third time since we departed Armitage. Slowing a little more, our train rounded the curve at the northwest end of Parsons Yard, swinging to the right parallel to the T&OC once again. In a moment more, we jogged rightward through the Frankfort Street crossover back onto our home railroad, then continued north up the T&OC southbound main, and in another minute we swung around the curve to the west and back across the C&O at Miami Crossing. Here the T&OC reverted to single track, and just as quickly the train yanked our caboose through the Auburn Track onto the Pennsylvania RR Miami side main toward Alton and the southern approach to Buckeye Yard. This pleasant journey would end too soon to suit me.

### **The Athens Subdivision Today**

What is left of the Hocking Valley Athens Subdivision? I have driven along the line a few times in the intervening five decades, detouring over to the grade crossings to have a look. It appears the line continues to operate under a Genessee & Wyoming short line flag, serving local traffic at least as far as Lancaster or Logan, and looks to be in pretty good condition. There is still active track in place from Lancaster to Nelsonville, but little sign of freight rail activity at the eastern end. The tracks of the Straitsville Branch north from Logan, abandoned 80 years ago, are still in place up to a glass plant north of town. Tracks



of the Monday Creek Subdivision, which somehow survived on the C&O roster until the early 1970s and later as part of the Scenic Railway, are now completely gone.

The HV Scenic Railway operates north on the old main line from Nelsonville to Logan, based at the reconstructed station. The HV main line rails are still in place for a short distance to the east of Nelsonville across the through truss double track bridge over the river onto the Hocking College campus. The old coal tower is gone, demolished fairly recently as a hazard, and the tracks beyond the college were pulled out in the early 1980s. The roundhouse has disappeared, but it looks like the adjoining machine shop is still there, next to the engine house built by the HV Scenic Railway. The old roadbed is visible and is in part a bike path down through The Plains to Armitage. The T&OC and its Armitage siding are still there, and very much active now as part of the Norfolk Southern. Remnants of the former interchange track to the C&O extend for a few car lengths north of the switch in the passing track. The C&O bridge across the Hocking there is now decked over as part of the bike trail. The CHVRR wye and connection onto the B&O in Athens is now long gone, like the B&O itself, abandoned and built over by development spurred by growth of Ohio University. The freight house and depot in Athens were gone by the mid-1980s.

The Pomeroy Subdivision main line between Hobson and Kanauga survives, now part of the Norfolk Southern which took over the T&OC from Conrail. The track east of Hobson was abandoned in 1979. The track between Oldtown and Dundas was pulled up in 1986. The southern stretch of the Subdivision west of Kanauga flourished for awhile in the 1980s and 90s, serving a power plant with coal from Minerton, but it too is now gone.

<b>Straitsville Subdivision - Built 1870; Abandoned 1930s</b> (distances from Logan)		<b>Monday Creek Subdivision - Built 1877-80; Abandoned 1972</b> (distances from Nelsonville)	
Logan	0.0	Nelsonville	0.0
Webb Summit	5.2	Doanville	2.3
Winona	6.4	Snow Fork Jct.	4.1
Gore	9.5	Monday	6.7
Monday Creek Jct.	10.4	Carbon Hill	8.8
Baird's Furnace	10.9	Sand Run Jct.	10.5
New Straitsville	12.7	Greendale	12.3
		Lost Run Jct.	13.7
		Monday Creek Jct.	16.8

<b>Snow Fork Subdivision - Built 1877-82; Abandoned 1940</b> (distances from Nelsonville)		<b>Brush Fork Subdivision - Built 1877; Abandoned 1940)</b> (distances from Nelsonville)	
Snow Fork Jct.	4.1	Brush Fork Jct.	8.1
Buchtel	5.3	Jobs	9.0
Orbiston	7.5	Consol	9.7
Brush Fork Jct.	8.1	New Pittsburgh	10.7
Murray City	9.6	End of Track	12.2
Ward Jct.	10.0		
Coalgate	12.5		
End of Track	13.9		

## **Notes, References and Web Links:**

I wrote this from memory from 45 years ago - corrections and comments are most welcome. Much gratitude to Jim Evans for supplying details and track charts to help my memory, and useful inputs from Ed Miller through Alex Campbell.

Ed Miller's *The Hocking Valley Railway*, Ohio University Press, 2007 is the definitive history and detail reference work on this line.

I also highly recommend Dave Dupler's website featuring many photos of the C&O between Athens and Columbus from the 1970s through the present. Here is the link to a hand-drawn map of Athens area showing C&O, B&O and T&OC interchanges, bridges and C&O freight depot:

[http://www.davedupler.com/athens/ath\\_map.jpg](http://www.davedupler.com/athens/ath_map.jpg)

Grosvenor Tower, 1975 (Dave Dupler website):

<http://www.davedupler.com/athens/XXX015.jpg>

Athens County Passenger Stations and Rail Map 1898:

<http://www.west2k.com/ohstations/athens.shtml>

Web links to Little Cities of Black Diamonds - history, photos, biographies and scrapbook clippings from the small coal mining towns of Hocking, Perry and Athens Counties served by the CHVRR Straitsville and Monday Creek lines, 1870s-1970s

<http://littlecitiesofblackdiamonds.wordpress.com/>

<http://littlecitiesofblackdiamonds.org/pages/ilcdirectory.html>

Southeast Ohio Railway Map (1914):

<http://railsandtrails.com/Maps/OhioRRCommission/1914/OHRR1914-se-100.jpg>

C&O historical site Nelsonville Track Map (not to scale) showing the HV yard along the Monday Creek Subdivision track, roundhouse and coaling tower:

<http://cohs.org/repository/archives/thumb/cohd/cohd-9.jpg>

Nelsonville Roundhouse and Machine Shop Postcard:

<http://cohs.org/repository/archives/thumb/cohs/cohs-31476.jpg>

Nelsonville Yard Office (built 1920):

<http://cohs.org/repository/archives/thumb/cohs/cohs-31480.jpg>

C&O Freight House in Lancaster

<http://www.rrpicturearchives.net/showPicture.aspx?id=2374901>