

= Altoona and Beech Creek Railroad =

The Altoona and Beech Creek Railroad was a 3 ft ( 914 mm ) narrow gauge railroad in Blair and Cambria Counties , Pennsylvania which operated during the late 19th and early 20th century . It carried passenger traffic up from the vicinity of Altoona to Wopsononock and coal and timber down from Wopsononock and Dougherty to Altoona . Originally constructed to develop coal mines and resort traffic atop the Allegheny Plateau , it became involved in a complicated and ultimately unsuccessful scheme to break the Pennsylvania Railroad 's control over the Clearfield Coalfield . Never very profitable , it went through several reorganizations , the last in 1913 . Conversion to 4 ft 8 1/2 in ( 1 1/4 @ 435 mm ) standard gauge in 1916 did not improve the situation , and the railroad was abandoned in 1919 .

= Charter and construction =

The railroad was chartered on May 27 , 1890 as the Altoona and Wopsononock Railroad . It was surveyed from Juniata , a northern suburb of Altoona , up Spring Run , and climbed a circuitous , twisting route up the Allegheny Front through Juniata Gap , to terminate at the newly established resort town of Wopsononock . By the time the first annual meeting of the stockholders was held on January 13 , 1891 , 5 miles ( 8 @ 0 km ) of the road had been completed as a 3 ft ( 914 mm ) narrow gauge line . The board ultimately decided to complete the remaining 4 miles ( 6 @ 4 km ) to the same gauge . Frank G. Patterson , an Altoona attorney , was elected president , and William L. Shellenberger vice @-@ president .

Rails were finished to the top of the Alleghenies on June 6 , and the first train arrived in Wopsononock on June 11 . The railroad was formally opened on July 2 , 1891 . An extension to Dougherty , 5 miles ( 8 @ 0 km ) beyond Wopsononock , was begun on September 31 , in order to serve mines of the newly formed Richland Coal Company , headed by Shellenberger . Patterson was also involved in the coal company , serving as its secretary .

= Extension and legal battle =

Patterson wished to extend the line to Dougherty , and a further 12 miles ( 19 km ) to Coalport on Clearfield Creek . To finance the extension , the shareholders , in November 1891 , authorized a \$ 60 @, @ 000 mortgage on the property , and allowed Patterson to issue himself 600 additional shares of stock . He did so , but never paid the money due for them to the company 's treasury .

On January 22 , 1892 , the railroad 's name was changed to the Altoona , Clearfield and Northern Railroad to reflect the projected extension , which was built that year as far as Dougherty . However , a struggle for control of the railroad now ensued .

Patterson had agreed to sell 60 % of the company 's stock to James Kerr , who was expected in turn to sell the stock to the Pennsylvania Railroad , at whose Juniata station the line terminated . However , before Patterson could transfer the stock to Kerr , several other directors of the railroad , including Shellenberger , contracted to sell a majority interest in the railroad to Samuel P. Langdon . Langdon controlled the Altoona and Philipsburg Connecting Railroad , a short line in the Philipsburg area whose southern end would reach Ramey , about 17 miles ( 27 km ) from Dougherty , in 1894 . He intended to connect the two railroads and use the AC & N to enter Altoona .

Patterson and Langdon both claimed to control a majority of the company 's stock , and in February 1893 , rival boards of directors were elected by stockholders loyal to those two figures . The issue of 600 shares to Patterson , authorized in 1891 , turned the issue , and its validity was ultimately upheld by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania and Patterson 's board of directors ordered seated . Langdon promptly petitioned for a receivership , and was appointed joint receiver with Patterson . Patterson , however , took most of the responsibility for operations . He was responsible having wyes installed at Wopsononock and Juniata in late 1894 so that the railroad 's engines did not have to back down the mountain . The co @-@ receivership was lifted on July 6 , 1896 , and Patterson took full control of the railroad again . However , the railroad failed to cover its operating expenses

shortly thereafter , and Patterson was re @-@ appointed receiver on September 28 , 1896 . On February 29 , 1897 , it was sold under foreclosure to William L. Shellenberger , on behalf of the bondholders ? the group which had allied with Langdon . On March 17 , 1897 , it was reorganized as the Altoona and Beech Creek Railroad .

Shellenberger and his fellow bondholders had good reason to seek control of the railroad . After their failure to deliver control of the road to Langdon , he brought suit against them . In exchange for his dropping the suit , they agreed to lease the Altoona and Beech Creek to the Pittsburgh , Johnstown , Ebensburg and Eastern Railroad , a holding company formed by Langdon , on highly favorable terms . The new company was to operate the Altoona & Philipsburg Connecting , planning to convert to standard gauge and extend the two railroads to a junction at East Frugality , near Dougherty . The PJE & E would be extended further south through Ebensburg and then down to the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad at Johnstown . During this period , the line was known as the " Altoona Division " of the PJE & E. On December 17 , 1898 , Langdon chartered the Altoona and Beech Creek Terminal Railroad , which would extend the Altoona and Beech Creek from Juniata to a new terminal at 9th Street and 15th Avenue in Altoona . However , he was unable to carry out these plans , and his lease was invalidated on March 27 , 1900 . Through appeals and legal maneuvers , Langdon was able to hold out until December 27 , 1901 , when the Sheriff of Blair County ejected the PJE & E employees and returned the Altoona and Beech Creek to its stockholders . The Altoona and Beech Creek Terminal was dissolved in 1905 ? 6 .

The Altoona and Beech Creek reported itself in the Official Guide of 1903 as having been extended to Fallentimber , 5 miles ( 8 @.@ 0 km ) beyond Dougherty . However , it does not appear that this extension was , in fact , built . By 1909 , the railroad had built two short branches of 1 @.@ 4 miles ( 2 @.@ 3 km ) each at the Juniata end of the line . The Kipple Branch left the main line near Broadway and Penn Avenue , Juniata , and circled around to the north , serving a few local industries and reaching the PRR 's main line at Juniata Junction , near 2nd Avenue and 10th Street . The Fairview Branch ran southwest from a wye near 25th Avenue and Broadway to end in the Fairview neighborhood of Altoona , at 23rd Avenue and 10th Street .

Despite the battle waged for possession of it , the railroad had not been very profitable . Passenger traffic to Wopsononock had been declining , and coal traffic from Dougherty was rather limited . Shellenberger installed a rock crusher atop the mountain , which also provided revenue . A major forest fire destroyed both the Wopsononock Hotel and the coal tipple at Dougherty on April 30 , 1903 . When the railroad became insolvent again , Shellenberger was appointed receiver on June 4 , 1909 . It was once more sold under foreclosure on April 30 , 1910 to H.A. Davis , and reorganized as the Altoona , Juniata and Northern Railway .

= = Conversion and abandonment = =

Andrew Kepple , one of the original Altoona & Wopsononock directors , was elected president of the newly organized company . The board remained largely unchanged , although Shellenberger finally severed his association with the railroad . It remained unprofitable , and Davis , in turn , sold the line to Sigmund Morris , of Altoona . Morris had incorporated the Altoona Northern Railroad on November 7 , 1912 to acquire the line , and the Altoona , Juniata and Northern was merged into it on January 16 , 1913 . Morris planned to convert the railroad to 4 ft 8 1 ? 2 in ( 1 @.@ 435 mm ) standard gauge , electrify it to make it an interurban , and extend it to connect with the Beech Creek Railroad ( a subsidiary of the New York Central Railroad ) at Patton . However , Morris was unable to execute these plans . A group of New York City investors took over the railroad about 1916 . They converted the railroad to standard gauge , operating initially with ex @-@ Pennsylvania Railroad 2 @-@ 6 @-@ 0s , but replacing them with Heislars when the 2 @-@ 6 @-@ 0s were found to be unsuitable for the track .

The conversion failed to make the railroad pay , and the company went into receivership again on August 8 , 1918 . The last passenger train was operated on July 16 , 1919 and the last coal train on July 30 . Negotiations with the bondholders to resume service were not successful , and the rails were removed in 1921 .

= = Equipment = =

= = = Engines = = =

The Altoona & Wopsononock initially owned two engines . # 1 was a National 2 @-@ 6 @-@ 0 , and # 2 a Baldwin 4 @-@ 4 @-@ 0 , both of which were purchased used from the Pittsburgh and Western Railroad . In 1892 , the Altoona , Clearfield & Northern bought # 3 , a Baldwin 4 @-@ 6 @-@ 0 . However , due to the depleted state of the railroad 's finances , it was unable to pay for # 3 . Samuel Langdon forestalled legal proceedings by having the locomotive transferred to his United Collieries Co . , which paid Baldwin in coal . Nothing is known of # 4 , if it ever existed . The Altoona & Beech Creek bought # 5 and # 6 , both Baldwin 2 @-@ 6 @-@ 0s , in 1901 , while still under Pittsburgh , Johnstown , Ebensburg & Eastern control . After the PJE & E lost its lease on the railroad , litigation ensued over the ownership of # 3 ; by the time the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania declared in favor of the A & BC in 1903 , United Collieries had sold it to the Surry , Sussex and Southampton Railroad . # 5 and # 6 were sold to the Ohio River and Western Railroad and the Tacajo Sugar Company , respectively , when the railroad was converted to standard gauge in 1916 .

The Altoona Northern initially purchased three ex @-@ PRR 2 @-@ 6 @-@ 0s ( built at Juniata Shops ) , numbered # 101 ? 103 . They were found to be unsuitable for the light track and steep grades , and were sold in 1917 . They were replaced by # 104 and # 105 , new two @-@ truck Heislars , and the railroad bought # 106 , a three @-@ truck Heisler , in 1918 . They were sold to various lumber companies when the railroad was abandoned .

= = = Passenger and freight equipment = = =

Details of the railroad 's rolling stock are obscure . In 1891 , it owned five passenger and three freight cars . In addition to the coaches that supported passenger runs to Wopsononock and Dougherty ( fourteen trains per day during the 1899 season ) , the railroad had at least one parlor car and several Brill @-@ built observation cars . Contemporary photographs show that the railroad built some of its own open @-@ air cars for excursion service . Photographs taken after the destruction of the Wopsononock Hotel and the decline in passenger traffic show a number of gondola cars for coal traffic . The railroad continued to maintain a standard gauge gondola fleet in the last years of its existence .

= = Stations = =

The following stations existed along the line , going from south to north :

Scenic points along the road included Mule Shoe Curve , the trestles and cut at Sandy Gap Bend , and the high bluffs along the right @-@ of @-@ way at Butcher Knife Point .