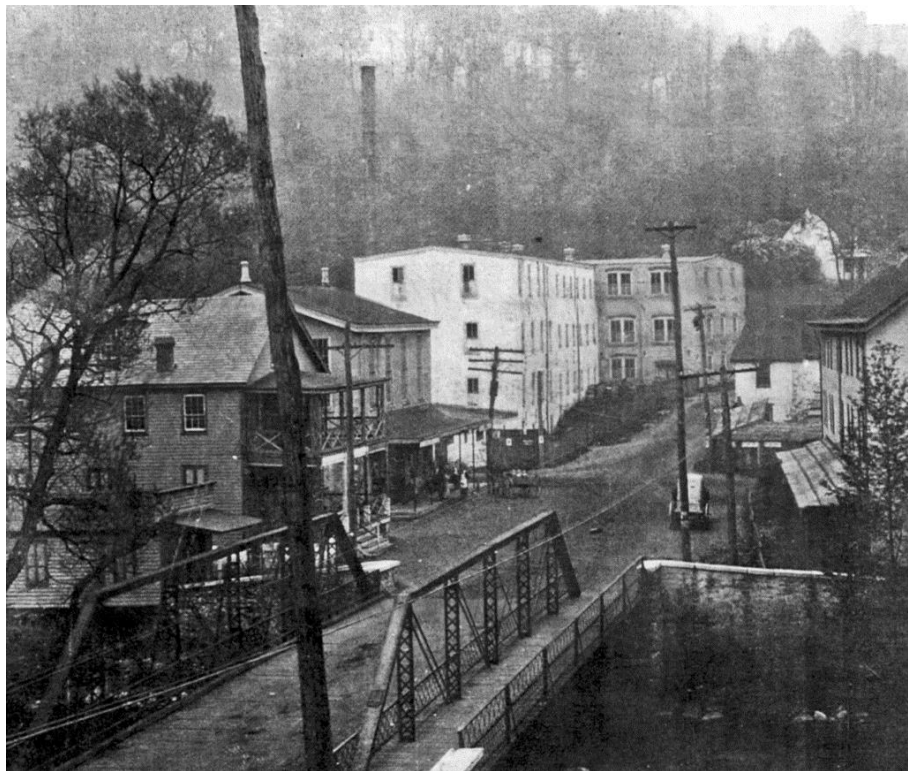


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Railroads of Landenberg

By Chris Black

It was 12:05 on October 19, 1872 when the first train on the Wilmington and Western Railroad reached its final destination in the village of Landenberg. A large crowd of the Townspeople gathered,



The village of Landenberg as seen in about 1905 from the vantage point of the Pomeroy and Newark railroad track crossing over Landenberg road. A newly rebuilt (1898) road bridge crossing the White Clay Creek connected Landenberg's business district with residential homes on the eastern hill rising from it. The railroad tracks ran along this side of the creek. (Courtesy NGTHC.)

dressed in their best outfits, to cheer on the dignitaries, public officials, and the press as they stepped down from the train. The procession marched up the Landenberg hill to beat the beat of Wilmington's Independent Cornet Band. When they reached the home of Charles Weiler, the general superintendent of the Landenberger Mills, there were speeches and a lavish reception. Joshua T. Heald, President of the Wilmington and Western Railroad, spoke not only of how proud he was of the work up to Landenberg, but of an optimistic future for this small railroad as it continued west. The Wilmington and Western Railroad was chartered in 1867 by a Corporate Board with the hope it would travel to Landenberg, Lancaster, York, Pittsburgh and eventually far to the west in the United States. However at its zenith, the railroad stretched for

only 19 miles. These 19 miles were from Wilmington to Landenberg, with seven stops along the way. The route to Landenberg was difficult and costly to construct. A steam locomotive can only travel safely on a grade of 3%. Due to the landscape of the White Clay Creek Valley, with high hills, low valleys, and frequent small streams or marshes the tracks' path had to be artificially created. Bridges and multiple cutouts scattered the valley, but nothing was more impressive than the Broad Run Trestle.

The Broad Run Trestle



The Broad Run Trestle. Broad Run Trestle built for the Wilmington & Western Railroad. Erected 1873 and demolished during WW II. (Courtesy NGTHC.)

The Broad Run Trestle, nearly a quarter of a mile in length, was located near Broad Run Road, east of Newark Road. The trestle, which was needed to lower the grade into the valley at Landenberg, towered over cornfields and meadows at a height of 40 feet! Railroad workers who constructed the trestle were impressed with themselves. They were so amazed by the result that upon completion they drove their supply train back and forth over the trestle numerous times with smiles on their faces and cheers from the locals.

The smiles didn't last as the Wilmington & Western Railroad quickly realized its dream of a railroad through the White Clay Creek Valley and beyond was destined for failure. Heald, the

President, resigned after on a few months due to "personal reasons," but many suspected he knew the upcoming fate of his creation. That fate came to pass after only three years when the company declared bankruptcy and was foreclosed to pay off its outstanding debts. In 1877, the company was sold at auction and its name changed to the Delaware and Western Railroad. Soon thereafter the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad bought the track and used it as an important link between Baltimore and Philadelphia. However, the stations along the line began to close as the demand for the trains, both passenger and freight decreased. By 1931 there was no more passenger service. The wooden trestle, although with some modifications, performed reliably for years. Barrels were placed at either end to collect rainwater; water was needed to extinguished fires caused by hot cinders shooting from the steam trains' fire boxes. Despite those provision, in the 1940's a fire weakened the trestle and it could no longer be used. The Broad Run Trestle was then dismantled along with the track extending from the trestle to Landenberg. The track became scrap iron for armaments needed during World War II. For many years the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad used the tracks of the Wilmington and Western, although in later years with diminished service. Today the Historic Red Clay Valley, Inc has preserved the tracks and operates a tourist train from Greenback, Delaware, traveling through the Red Clay Valley.

The Pomeroy and Delaware City

The second railroad that stopped at the Landenberg Union Passenger Terminal and other rail sidings in Landenberg was the Pomeroy & Delaware City Railroad completed in 1873. As the name implied, this railroad ran north to south from Pomeroy in Chester County to Delaware City, Delaware. It was of major importance to the area because it was a transporter of coal from central Pennsylvania. From the first days of the railroad until the line was abandoned, Landenberg families depended on coal to heat their homes. The coal was dumped off at the multiple siding, offshoots of the main track line used for parking train cars. These sidings were



The Landenberg Train Station circa 1872 serving both the Wilmington & Western and Pomeroy & Newark railroad companies. (Courtesy NGTHC.)

located at the various mills and manufacturing buildings in the area.

Trains also helped farmers and manufactures ship their products to the large market city of Wilmington. Farmers would contract for space on a train to ship their goods to the city; this was a much less expensive and time consuming than shipping by wagon on the unimproved dirt roads. Along the rail lines numerous mills on the White Clay Creek produced products ranging from wooden spokes for wheels to woolen cloth to flour. These mills were the reason the railroads came to Landenberg.

The Other Railroad Also Goes Under

Although the Pomeroy and Delaware City Railroad lasted sixty-four years, its financial success was limited, at best. The railway started off under the name of Doe Run and White Clay Creek Railroad, but was sold before it was built and renamed the Pomeroy and Newark. Company mergers created a longer railroad that now reached its planned destination of Delaware City and with that another name change, to the Pennsylvania & Delaware RR. This railroad continued to change names and owners for the next 75 years. Most, however, consider it to have been under the control of the Pennsylvania Railroad either directly or indirectly.



The Sheehan Coal and Lumberyard circa early 1900's. Both the Pomeroy & Newark and the Wilmington & Western Railroads serviced this business. By 1942 most of lumberyard deliveries were by truck. Soon thereafter both railroads abandoned their service to Landenberg. (Courtesy NGTHC.)

With the introduction of the automobile and the improved quality of roads, trains lost their appeal as well as their customer base. In 1936 the Pennsylvania & Delaware railroad was abandoned from the Delaware/Pennsylvania State line to Landenberg, severing the connection to the port city of Delaware City. Only a few years later in 1943 the railroad tracks were taken up from Landenberg, through Avondale, to Chatham, again to use the scrap for war material during World War II.

The Railroads Have Come and Gone

The railroads of Landenberg may no longer be with us, but they have left their mark on the landscape and the people of the community. If one looks closely while strolling around the village, signs of a more industrial, populated past can be seen. Next time you travel down the Landenberg Hill toward the bridge look on the left and notice the high concrete abutments on the hillside. In that very spot 134 years ago a railroad bridge was being constructed which would pass over the road.

Other remnants of the railroads that can be seen today are the concrete supports that jut out from the sides of some of the Creek banks. These concrete supports once held the rails carrying passenger cars of Landenberg folk, traveling from the village to the big city of Wilmington.



Two bridges of the past: the former 1898 Pratt Pony Truss bridge (rebuilt 2009) in the foreground crossing the White Clay Creek. In the background the bridge overpass on Landenberg road for both railroad companies, though primarily used by the Pomeroy Newark Railroad. (Courtesy NGTHC.)

Rail service between Landenberg and the outside world effectively ended in the early 1930's. The passing of the railroads marked the ends of an era; no longer would steam trains travel the valley of the White Clay.

Note this article is from the Fall 2006 Township Newsletter with additional photos. New Garden resident and Penn State Junior, Chris Black, researched the history of Landenberg's railroad as a volunteer project under the auspices of the New Garden Historical Commission. The original article contained the Broad Run Trestle photo. Other photos are courtesy of the New Garden Historical Commission Archives.

[Click here for information about the Pomeroy & Newark Railroad.](#)