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Nathaniel Guest
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RE: Colebrookdale Railroad

In regards to the pending abandonment application by the present owner of the former Colebrookdale Branch of the Reading Railroad, we have been asked to comment on the line's historic significance.

The Colebrookdale Railroad was constructed by the Reading Railroad and opened in 1869. The line was locally important to the small rural communities through which it passed, and was especially important for the growth and development of the towns of Boyertown, Bechtelsville, and Barto. Without the railroad, industrial development in these towns, mostly in the form of iron ore mining, iron making, foundries, and other metal forming, would not have occurred.

However, the Colebrookdale line never achieved the traffic levels its builders had hoped for, and consequently, the Reading never spent much to upgrade the line. Ironically, this underinvestment means that today, the Colebrookdale Branch, as it passes through a still rural and isolated countryside, looks much like it did in the 19th Century, much more so than most other railroad lines. In particular, the line's bridges are almost a linear museum of railroad bridge technology. Most notable are the two wooden trestles above Pine Forge, possibly the only remaining large examples in eastern Pennsylvania of this type of once-common construction. Also notable are the stone arches of the Manatawny Creek bridge at Pine Forge, stonework which probably dates to 1869, and also the Ironstone Creek steel truss bridge below Boyertown, originally built in 1905 and moved to its present location in the late 1920s. A variety of other bridge styles are also extant along the line.

One of the chartered goals of the Reading Company Technical and Historical Society is to promote the use of rail transportation. Proposals are ongoing to restore passenger service between Reading and Philadelphia due to energy costs and highway congestion, and this line stands as a potential feeder line. Because rail transportation is more energy-efficient than trucking, retention of the line for potential future freight transport merits consideration. We support the retention of the Colebrookdale Branch if there is a continuing need for rail service.

Sincerely,

Richard K. Bates

Richard K. Bates
Archivist & Publications Editor,
Reading Company Technical & Historical Society