

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

WESTERN NEW YORK & PENNSYLVANIA RAILWAY, BRIDGE No. 30
(Pennsylvania Railroad, Allegheny River Bridge)

HAER No. PA-533

Location: Spanning Allegheny River, north of State Rt. 446 Bridge, Eldred, McKean County, Pennsylvania.

USGS Quadrangle: Eldred, Pennsylvania (7.5-minute series).

UTM Coordinates: 17/716910/4641945

Date of Construction: 1900.

Basis for Dating: Plaque on bridge.

Designer: R. D. McCreary (Chief Engineer, Western New York & Pennsylvania Railway).

Fabricator: Pencoyd Iron Works (Pencoyd, Pa.).

Builder: A. & P. Roberts Co.

Present Owner: Norfolk Southern Railroad.

Present Use: Railroad bridge.

Structure Type: Pin-connected Pratt through truss.

Significance: The Allegheny River Bridge reflects the Pennsylvania Railroad's improvement of recently acquired lines during the prosperous first decade of the twentieth century.

Historian: Justin M. Spivey, April 2000.

Project Information: The Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) conducted the Pennsylvania Historic Railroad Bridges Recording Project during 1999 and 2000, under the direction of Eric N. DeLony, Chief. The project was supported by the Consolidated Rail Corporation (Conrail) and a grant from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC). Justin M. Spivey, HAER engineer, researched and wrote the final reports. Preston M.

Thayer, historian, Fredericksburg, Virginia, conducted preliminary research under contract. Jet Lowe, HAER photographer, and Joseph E. B. Elliott, contract photographer, Sellersville, Pennsylvania, produced large-format photographs.

Description and History

This line was originally the McKean & Buffalo Railroad, a coal railroad from Larabee to Clermont, built in 1874 and opened the following year. The Western New York & Pennsylvania Railway (WNY&P) acquired the line in 1887, designating it the Clermont Branch of the Buffalo Division.¹ With a total mileage of almost 550 miles, the WNY&P was a fairly large system, with lines stretching from Buffalo, New York, to New Castle, Pennsylvania. To establish a favorable route between Buffalo and the Great Lakes, the Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR) purchased a controlling interest in the WNY&P in 1900 and negotiated a one-year lease on 14 July. A twenty-year agreement replaced the annual leases in 1903, effectively consolidating the WNY&P into the PRR system.²

On the eve of PRR control in 1900, WNY&P corporate records show that it continued to maintain and improve its lines until the lease took effect. The WNY&P bridge over the Allegheny in swampy territory south of Larabee, in fact, bears a date of 1900 on its builder's plate.³ On 13 April 1899, Chief Engineer R. D. McCreary had written to the WNY&P board of directors about improving the Buffalo Division for 131-ton freight engines then being considered. When the board responded favorably, McCreary reported that Bridge No. 30 "at Larrabees [sic]" was among those needing replacement, with an estimated cost of \$8,000. He had evidently underestimated, because the contract with Pencoyd Iron Works, signed on 31 May 1900, was for \$10,608. Pencoyd agents A. & P. Roberts erected the single span, a pin-connected Pratt through truss 151'-9-1/2" long and weighing 240,000 pounds.⁴ Although the details of the span are conventional for the time, the non-standard length indicates that existing abutments were re-used.

Notes

1. Jeff Bell and Dick Robertson, of Eldred, Pa., letter to author, 10 Jan. 2000.
2. Howard W. Schotter, *The Growth and Development of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company: A Review of the Charter and Annual Reports of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company 1846 to 1926* (Philadelphia: Press of Allen, Lane, and Scott, 1927), 264-5, 279.
3. The author is grateful to Bell and Robertson for providing information from the builder's plate.
4. Western New York & Pennsylvania Railway, *Minute Book*, 349-50 (27 Apr. 1899), 428 (29 Mar. 1900), and 447 (31 May 1900). Located in Historical Collections and Labor Archives, Paterno Library, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pa.

Acknowledgment

The author is grateful to Jeff Bell and Dick Robertson of Eldred, Pa., for responding to a preliminary survey form.

Additional Sources

1. Interstate Commerce Commission, Bureau of Valuation, Engineering Field Notes, Western New York & Pennsylvania Railway, Box 6102, Record Group 134, National Archives, College Park, Md.
2. Milepost 0.86, region/division/branch 302338, aperture card files, Consolidated Rail Corp., Philadelphia, Pa. [transferred to Norfolk Southern Railway Co., Atlanta, Ga.].