

HARVEYSLAKE.ORG

The Harvey's Lake Trolley Line

The following material is adapted from Chapter 7 of Harold E. Cox, Wyoming Valley Trolleys: Street Railways of Wilkes-Barre, Nanticoke and Pittston, Pennsylvania (Forty-Fort, PA 1988). Copyright © Harold E. Cox 1988. Used By Permission. The Preface and Afterword, plus material in brackets throughout the text, has been added to enhance the article.

– F. Charles Petrillo, February 2002.

Preface

The earliest “trolley line” in the Wyoming Valley was built in 1866 to connect Public Square in Wilkes-Barre with Kingston. It was a trolley-car on rails pulled by a horse, as were other early trolley lines. The earliest electric powered street railway was operational in 1888 in Wilkes-Barre. As other early electric lines were developed in the Valley a consolidation of capital investment and the various local lines occurred in 1891 with the creation of the Wilkes-Barre and Wyoming Valley Traction Company (W-B&WVT).

I. John B. Reynolds: The Construction Years (1893-1897)- The Wilkes-Barre and Northern Railroad

In the 1890s most street railway systems attempted to establish lines that would serve recreational facilities. It was believed that this was a good way to improve business, a belief which in the long run turned out to be overly optimistic. Resort riding flourished only during the summer months and was characterized by extremely high levels of peak loading. The cars, power supplies and terminal facilities required to support suburban operations of this character were fully used only about three months of the year and seldom paid their way. Nevertheless, traction managers continued building parks and extending lines almost until the eve of World War I.

The Wilkes-Barre & Wyoming Valley Traction Company (W-B&WVT) was more fortunate than most properties. The fact that Luzerne County's population was widely scattered in mine patches and supporting villages meant that there was a regular source of residential and business traffic along most of its lines. The main amusement park was Sans Souci, roughly midway on

the line from Wilkes-Barre to Nanticoke. The only line which fell into the classic resort service tradition of other cities was the line to Harvey's Lake, which had little justification as a trolley service except in the summer. It was also the only line which climbed the hills and escaped from the confines of the Wyoming Valley.

Harvey's Lake has the distinction as the largest natural lake in Pennsylvania. Its appeal as a summer resort developed in the late 19th century and was enhanced in the 1880s by the construction of the Wilkes-Barre and Harvey's Lake Railroad Co. Chartered on 26 September 1885, the line was organized by Albert Lewis, a local lumber and ice magnate who had purchased extensive lands in Dallas, Lake and Ross townships. It appears that Lewis was also in league with the Lehigh Valley RR and the Harvey's Lake RR was designed as part of a new rail route between the Wyoming Valley and New York state. The road opened between the Valley and the village of Alderson, on the north shore of Harvey's Lake, on 16 June 1887 and was sold to the Lehigh Valley in August. The connection to form a through line to Towanda and New York state was not made until 1 July 1893. Until then, the railroad's traffic was dependent upon Harvey's Lake business and clearly demonstrated the inherent dangers of a resort-based operation. During its first full year of operation, 1888, just short of 60 percent of its passenger traffic was carried in just four months - June through September.

In spite of the fact that the area was still thinly settled, there were those who felt that an electric line with frequent service to the inlet section of the Lake, now called Sunset, would generate enough business to pay, even though it duplicated the route of the Lehigh Valley steam road as far as Dallas. John B. Reynolds' urge to build electric lines does not seem to have been sated by his difficulties with creating a trolley system on the West Side [related elsewhere in Cox's Wyoming Valley Trolleys] and his abortive proposed line between Glen Lyon and Nanticoke, discussed elsewhere in this book. In April 1893 he secured a charter for the Luzerne, Dallas and Harvey's Lake Railway (LD&HL). This was to connect with the West Side line at Luzerne, either transferring passengers to the W-B&WVT city cars or running its own L,D&HL car on W-B&WVT tracks to Public Square.

Reynolds' reception was mixed. An attempt to get a franchise through Kingston borough was denied in July on the grounds that the streetcars were occupying too many of the narrow streets already. While the LD&HL secured rights in Dallas, there was no money available to build the line and time limits on the beginning of construction were coming due. Reynolds solved this problem in a traditional manner by symbolic construction. In late November 1893 the company broke ground in front of the home of Burgess Perrego in Dallas. About 50 feet of roadbed was graded and a couple of rails laid. The legal niceties having been taken care of, it was announced that no more work would be done until spring. Nothing was done in 1894 and little was heard from the project until mid-May 1895 when it was announced that the line would be built that summer.

Ground was broken for a power house at Raub's Mill at the north end of Luzerne. At the same time, it was stated that in addition to the Harvey's Lake line, a line would be built from Luzerne south to Plymouth over the back road through Welsh Hill, and north over the back road through Wyoming to West Pittston. Construction began at Shavertown working towards Luzerne on 9

September 1895. Once again, Reynolds' plans were to be frustrated. The line was partly graded through the mountain gorge between Luzerne and Trucksville when work was halted by several landowners who refused to give or sell right-of-way through their lands. One was Albert Lewis, a large landowner in the area, president of the Wilkes-Barre and Harvey's Lake RR, and an important figure in the Lehigh Valley RR. The mountainous terrain surrounding the Toby's Creek gorge above Luzerne prevented any alternate route from being selected and Lewis' extensive timberland holdings above Dallas made it difficult to find a route which did not go through his property. Since electric railways lacked the right of eminent domain under Pennsylvania law, all work was suspended on 16 November 1895. [A trolley could not condemn land to lay rails and pay the objecting owner the value of property taken for trolley use. A railroad, however, had this authority under state law.]

Reynolds was still not finished. On 29 January 1896 he chartered under state law a steam railroad company, the Wilkes-Barre and Northern Railroad, with Reynolds holding 1984 of the 2000 shares outstanding among the incorporators. Under state law, steam roads had the right of eminent domain and could condemn the property of recalcitrant land owners. Thomas A. Wright was selected as the chief engineer of the company in March and laid out a route. The contract for construction was let in May and President Reynolds was authorized to buy two locomotives and necessary cars.

Reynolds was still using the old LD&HL company as well. On 27 February 1896, the LD&HL had concluded a contract with Wyoming Valley Traction to run cars over the North Street Bridge (also called the Pierce Street Bridge near the present Courthouse) and to Public Square, Wilkes-Barre, indicating that Reynolds' long-range plans were still to build an electric line. The LD&HL gave up rights to build any lines other than to Harvey's Lake and over the back road to Plymouth. All of the franchises which the LD&HL had secured east of the Iron Bridge in Luzerne were to go to the Traction company, eliminating a potential competitor in areas already served by the W-B& WVT. Traction was also to get use of the back road line, which would never be built, between Larksville and Plymouth and could run special cars, but not regular service, from Luzerne to Harvey's Lake. The LD&HL rights could be reassigned to the Wilkes-Barre & Northern and this was done when the new company's board approved purchased of all of the property and rights of the LD&HL on 30 July 1896 for \$15,000.00.

Still there were to be complications. Albert Lewis owned a lot in downtown Dallas, just opposite the Lehigh Valley station. On May 18, 1896, a Lehigh Valley track gang laid a track along the edge of this property on Lehigh Valley land. The WB&N track gang continued to lay across the Lewis land, the chosen route, but did not cross the boundary onto the competing railroad's land. The following day, the board of directors of the Albert Lewis Lumber Co. met and apparently transferred title to the lot to the Lehigh Valley Railroad. According to the *Wilkes-Barre Record*, "About half past 8 [that] night, two engines, two construction cars, and three gondolas came up the Valley, having on board superintendent Alexander Mitchell and about 150 laborers. At the same time, the gravel train from Alderson with twenty-five men reached here, but took the switch near the Lewis mill above town, and were held as a sort of reserve force. When Mr. Mitchell and his gang reached the depot, he gave orders for the destruction of the

track laid by the Wilkes-Barre and Northern on Monday, and in just ten minutes' time the track was torn up and the ties and rails thrown in a heap by Yapple's blacksmith shop. It was at first surmised that they would lay a switch from their track across the lot and fill it with loaded cars. Instead, they threw two gondolas off of the track and pushed them over on to prevent their being shoved out of the way by any ordinary force of men; they actually pulled the trucks [wheels] out from under one of them, leaving it looking like a wreck.....The sympathy of the people in this vicinity is almost entirely with the new company." Reynolds' company took the case to court and on 5 July secured a verdict allowing them to pass through the property and to continue on to the Lake.

Service had been promised to Dallas by 1 July and to the Lake by September. Then, it was announced, they would build the line to Plymouth. Once again, the announcements were premature. There is evidence that the company was in financial trouble by July 1896. Apparently underfinanced from the beginning, the cost of building the line had increased over initial estimates due to route relocation and the difficulty of preparing a right-of-way which often ran through solid rock. No one could accuse Reynolds of cheap construction. The line was the first in the area to be built with rail in 60-foot lengths and, while 48-pound rail was used, this seemed adequate for a line running primarily passenger service and lightweight former elevated railway locomotives. Through heavy cut and fill work, an average grade of only 2 percent was achieved between Luzerne and Dallas. Masonry culverts were built at twelve locations to avoid washouts and the cut at Trucksville required the labor of 100 men for most of the summer. During all of this work the company maintained the fiction of building a steam railroad, much of the additional expense being required to establish grades available for steam power.

Plans to build from the Harvey's Lake inlet partly around the lake to the outlet at Harvey's Creek were quietly shelved, as was the proposal to build from Luzerne to Plymouth and a connection from Luzerne to the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western R.R. in Kingston. Periodic reports were issued concerning construction progress. A steam locomotive was delivered at the beginning of October and was used initially to haul dirt trains. Two additional locomotives arrived shortly thereafter. A 1923 report claimed that all three were purchased second-hand from the Brooklyn Elevated Railway. However, the only locomotive of which a picture survives shows a 4-6-0 of Baldwin design apparently numbered WB&N #3 which seems far too large for use on an elevated line. The other two locomotives were numbered 9 and 11. They apparently kept their original Brooklyn numbers and were part of the group of 30 locomotives built by the Rhode Island Locomotive Works in 1885 and used to open the line. The minute book of the Wilkes-Barre, Dallas & Harvey's Lake, corporate successor to the W-B&N, indicates that one locomotive, probably #3, was sold in late November 1899 but no record has been found of the sale. Two others, apparently the elevated locomotives, were sold for \$600.00 on 9 January 1901 to a firm identified only as Grant & Williams. Two passenger coaches and one passenger and baggage car were purchased from the Jackson & Sharp Co. of Wilmington, Delaware, on 8 October 1896 and were delivered in December. The lack of rolling stock seems to have been the last hurdle to operation. The W-B&N ran an inspection trip from Luzerne to Dallas on Saturday, 19 December 1897. The line was open for some passenger traffic on the 21st, with the first car leaving Dallas at 6:15 a.m. Regular service began on 3 January 1897.

The W-B & N's problems continued. On 9 January 1897, the first Saturday of regular operation, a passenger car broke its coupling during the ascent to Dallas. Since the car brakes were operated by steam from the locomotive and the emergency hand-broke chain broke, the WB & N brakeman was unable to stop the car and rode it downhill five miles into Luzerne borough where it collided head-on with an outbound Luzerne car. The electric city car was thrown the side of a house and one passenger was killed. This was only the first of many major wrecks which would take place on the Harvey's Lake route. Local legend, supported by the only known picture of a W-B & N train at Dallas, suggests that the locomotives thereafter pushed the cars up the hill, rather than pulling them.

The contract between the Wyoming Valley Traction Company and LD&HL originally provided for the Harvey's Lake cars to run into Wilkes-Barre, operating as electric cars in the city and having their motors disconnected for use as steam trailers on the Harvey's Lake line. The cars had not been electrified by the time that service began and they met the W-B WVT's Luzerne cars at the borough line. Initially, special cars were run over the Luzerne line to meet the steam cars. This lasted for less than a week. Winter traffic did not warrant the extra service and the transfer service was handled by regular Luzerne cars. There was very little initial traffic. There were six trains a day to Dallas, the connecting cars leaving Wilkes-Barre at 6:30, 8:50 and 11:10 a.m., and 3:50, 5:10 and 10:45 p.m. Only four ran on Sundays. The trip from Dallas to Luzerne cost 15 cents. From Luzerne to Public Square was an additional five cents.

During the winter, the W-B&N purchased the Lake Grove House, a hotel built in 1881 at the Harvey's Lake inlet. The trolley terminal was on the top of the hill behind the hotel. The Lake Grove Hotel was to be expanded, but it gave way a year later to a new hotel built on the site.

The W-B&N cars were motorized and began operating over W-B&WVT tracks from Luzerne to Public Square on 23 March 1891. The steam locomotives still hauled the cars northward from Luzerne. Meanwhile, with spring coming, the railroad turned to the completion of the line north of Dallas. The previous fall, three routes had been surveyed, one by way of the West Dallas Schoolhouse, another (the one chosen) on a direct course between Dallas and the inlet of Harvey's Lake, and the third a circuitous route which would have gone through Lehman village and reached the lake at its outlet at Harvey's Creek. The Lehman route was a case of traditional railroad bribery, the company offering to exchange convenient transportation for free right-of-way with the Dallas-Inlet right-of-way disputes settled, there was little to prevent completion of the line. Seven new open steam trailers were acquired from Jackson & Sharp which were towed by the locomotives to Luzerne, and by closed motor cars from there to Public Square. Even though the primary purpose of the line was to reach the recreational facilities at Harvey's Lake, management felt compelled to build its own amusement park between Dallas and Shavertown on a tract of land owned by Reynolds. A \$5.00 gold piece was offered as a prize for the best name and Fernbrook Park was chosen in time for the opening of the facility on 5 June 1897. The new name was not universally popular as the *Dallas Post* preferred Jackson Park and was somewhat put out when its advice was not taken. Trains ran hourly from Luzerne to Dallas and one train ran from Idetown in the morning, returning that evening and was the first passenger service recorded over the extension to Idetown. A free horse-drawn omnibus was operated from

Idetown for passengers to the Lake.

Regular service from the summit at Idetown began on 13 June 1897. It took two weeks more to finish the line down the mountain to the Lake. The line terminated at the top of a hill - now known as Oneonta Street - behind the Lake Grove House, which stood at the end of an iron bridge spanning the lake inlet. The hotel was formerly served by a tedious three - or four-hour stagecoach ride from the city. The W-B&N constructed a small picnic grove at the hilltop station. A special car was operated for newspaper reporters on Sunday, 27 June 1897. Service opened with a six-car excursion on Tuesday, 29 June, accompanied by Oppenheim's Orchestra, a local musical group. Some of the more prominent guests were listed in the newspaper. However, Albert Lewis' name does not appear. Regular cars began running on the following day. The event was greeted with great enthusiasm. One unidentified gentleman was quoted by the *Wilkes-Barre Union Leader* as stating that, "It was only a question of a few years....when Harvey's Lake will be to Wilkes-Barre what Atlantic City is to Philadelphia, and Coney Island to New York. Soon bath houses will spring up along these shores, gradually amusements will creep in, even a midway will spring up somewhere, and this mountain resort will be one of the greatest in the country." In the meantime, the W-B&N augmented its resort facilities with a picnic ground opened at the lake on 3 July 1897 at the Inlet area.

Before this ambitious prediction could be fulfilled, a better way had to be found to run the cars. Unfortunately, the company lacked the money to electrify; the cost was estimated at \$50,000.00. There is evidence that the W-B&WVT had been increasingly interested in gaining control of the Wilkes-Barre & Northern. John Graham, general manger of Wyoming Valley Traction, was involved with the Harvey's Lake Hotel & Land Co., which planned a hotel to replace the Lake Grove House. He had held 100 shares of stock in the W-B&N from about the time when the first financial crisis occurred in July 1896. By early 1898, his holdings had expanded to 450 shares, second only to Reynolds. In late January, Reynolds made one last attempt to salvage his creation, proposing to issue an additional \$200,000.00 in bonds to cover the cost of electrification and not tidy up the company's financial condition. He never got his chance. On 8 February, a bondholders' committee, including Graham and other prominent figures in the W-B&WVT, formed a committee of trustees to manage the company. Reynolds resigned as president on the 22nd and was immediately replaced by Graham. It was announced that the two companies had not merged nor were they allied; but that they would remain as separate organizations, operating under such "reciprocal arrangements as would give the traveling public the best service." This was undoubtedly aimed at keeping the W-B&WVT from becoming involved legally in the financial problems of the Harvey's Lake road. Graham got in one parting shot, selling the Fernbrook Park land to the WB&N in January 1898 for \$47,400.00.

II. John Graham: The Wilkes-Barre, Dallas and Harvey's Lake Railway Company (1898)

Graham predicted that the line would be electrified by 15 June, thereby proving himself t be no better a prophet than Reynolds. The electric cars did not run by 15 June, nor did they run at all that summer. The delay was apparently caused by the financial condition of the road. In July,

the interest on the bonds not having been paid, the line was foreclosed and sold on 20 August to the bondholders. The property was immediately reorganized as the Wilkes-Barre, Dallas and Harvey's Lake Railway (W-BD&HL). All service was suspended from 4 through 16 December 1898, reportedly to allow for car repairs. This probably involved the installation of the electric brakes which were put on the cars in an effort to avoid more disastrous accidents. Service was restored on 17 December but through electric cars apparently did not run until the 19th. It required a few days to adjust schedules and the first all-electric schedule was dated 22 December 1898.

Despite the fact that the Harvey's Lake line would keep separate books until 1910, it now became an integral part of the Wilkes-Barre system, sharing equipment and coordinating its operations with the main system. Although Harvey's Lake now had both a steam railroad and a trolley line, other schemes appeared. A third-rail line to the lake was proposed in August 1903 which would have mile-long tunnel at Idetown directly to the Lake front. Another line was proposed which would run up 8th Street, Wyoming and through the Wyoming Gap. Rumors surfaced that the Lackawanna and Wyoming Railroad would build a line to the lake, but nothing ever came of any of the proposals.

III. The Short Line and Decline

The W-BD&HL made several half-hearted proposals of its own. In April 1901 rights were granted to build a line looping the lake on the public road. However, this was never built, possibly because of strong opposition from property owners. There were reports that the W-BD&HL would build a tunnel at Idetown but no further changes would take place until 1912.. From the beginning of electric service, the Harvey's Lake cars had operated through Luzerne, following Main and Bennett streets. It was an indirect way to get to Dallas or Harvey's Lake and ran on narrow congested streets. This meant that cars to the Lake could be delayed by street traffic and by local Luzerne cars through the borough, an arrangement which caused increasing dissatisfaction. Nothing could be done about the situation in the early 1900s because of financial problems of the W-B&WVT and the holding company which controlled it. In November 1909 the establishment of a new operating company, the Wilkes-Barre Railway, made new financing possible and on 23 September 1910, a new dummy corporation, the Wilkes-Barre & Luzerne Street Railway, was chartered. This company built a connecting line over Division Street, Kingston, and over a private-right-of-way to a connection with the old line just above the Iron Bridge across Toby's Creek in Luzerne. The new line was built during 1911 and 1912, with considerable delays incurred in the construction of a railroad underpass for the line. The first rest run over what came to be known as the Short Line operated on 1 August 1912. The formal opening was on the 5th and regular service began the following day. Operation over the Short Line cut ten minutes off the running time, allowing the Lake to be reached in 55 minutes.

In addition to Fernbrook Park and Harvey's Lake, the line served several large cemeteries. Branch lines were built into the grounds of Mt. Greenwood Cemetery in August 1910 and St. Nicholas Cemetery in July 1914. The Mt. Greenwood spur was torn up in February 1932, the spur to St. Nicholas in October 1931. Baggage car service was provided to the Lake through the

summer of 1915. Trailers were operated during the summer far longer than on any other line. They were operated to the Lake through the 1916 season and ran as far as Mount Greenwood until October 1918. The Lake line continued to have the problem of uneven traffic. During the peak year of 1914, 65% of all car mileage over the line ran in only four months - from June to September. That winter, hourly service was provided from the Lake. This was clearly in excess of needs and alternate cars were turned at Dallas beginning in February 1916. While it meant that car crews sat at Dallas for forty minutes between trips, the power costs were saved. The Lake line also continued to have spectacular wrecks. On 22 September 1914, W-B&WVT Superintendent Edward Ervin was killed while motoring a two-car train which collided with an open motor car, operating in utility service and hauling a trailer loaded with stone. He had been running the car as a favor while the regular motorman ate his lunch. On 22 September 1921, cars 324 and 330 were destroyed in a head-on collision between Hays Siding and Dallas.

While business to the Lake declined steadily throughout the 1920s, the growth of population south of Dallas caused ever greater inequity in passenger loading. A decision to abandon the Hays Substation in 1931 in order to cut operating costs led to the closure of the line above Idetown on 5 July 1931, a shuttle bus hauling passengers from Idetown to the Lake. The schedule to Idetown allowed 40 minutes to get from Public Square during non-rush hours, an arrangement which allowed motormen little time for contemplation. Effective 16 September 1931, the cars were stopped at Dallas, providing some breathing room for crewmen. Alternate cars ran through to Idetown during the summer of 1932. Thereafter regular cars terminated at Dallas, although the Idetown line remained intact and was used during 1936 and 1937 for the operation of special cars for WPA workers. [When the trolley retreated to Dallas, the Wyoming Valley Autobus Company, a trolley subsidiary, leased the bus line to I.A. Rood, a Harvey's Lake businessman. His son, Ben Rood, operated the bus for a time.]

Service over the Short Line was discontinued because of highway construction, the last car operating on 25 September 1938. Dallas cars were rerouted over the original line through Luzerne until the following spring when Luzerne's Main Street was also rebuilt. The last cars from the Square to Dallas ran on 30 April 1939. In keeping with its accident record, a streetcar demolished an automobile at the Mount Greenwood highway crossing about 2:30 p.m. The streetcar rode up and over the auto and required the use of jacks to raise it high enough to get the auto out from underneath. [A line to from Wilkes-Barre to Dallas was substituted for the trolley. At Dallas passengers changed to another bus to the Lake.]

IV. The Dallas Sleeper

[As an aside to the Lake's trolley history, special mention must be noted of the Dallas Sleeper.] The Wilkes-Barre trolley system operated only two late-night services. Hourly service to Plymouth via Carey Avenue ran for many years. On the Harvey's Lake line, the large number of company employees who lived along line apparently led to the operation of a service known as the Dallas Sleeper for many years, providing transport home after the end of evening runs and giving morning crews transport to work in the morning, as well as service for other passengers. By October 1921, the car left Public Square at 11:30 p.m., making trips to Luzerne at 11:30 and

12:30. At 1:30 a.m., the car left Public Square and ran to Dallas. It then returned to the East Dallas barn where the crew waited for about two hours, presumably getting a nap before leaving Dallas at 4:05 a.m., running through Luzerne and returning to Public Square. After four more trips to varying points on the Harvey's Lake line to provide inbound early morning rush hour service, the car returned to the barn at 8:30 a.m. This schedule does not appear to have been significantly changed for at least twenty years. Even after conversion to bus the service continued to be operated and lasted at least through World War II.

Afterword

Elsewhere in the Valley the trolley system was transformed through various leases and corporate reorganizations in response to both financial problems and competition from bus systems. By 1924 the Wilkes-Barre Railway Corporation controlled the Valley's trolley systems. Plagued by the Depression, emerging bus lines, and Work Progress Administration (WPA), road building for private automobiles, the local system by 1937 evolved into the Wyoming Valley Autobus Company (bus lines) and the Wilkes-Barre Trackless Trolley Company (electric bus) and the Wyoming Valley Public Service Company (electric trolley). In 1940 these companies were consolidated into the Wilkes-Barre Transit Company. The last electric trolley lines were closed in 1947-1950. The last electric trolley ran on a Nanticoke line on October 15, 1950. Trackless trolley lines were fully closed by late 1958.