

**A GENERAL CHRONOLOGY  
OF THE  
PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD COMPANY  
ITS PREDECESSORS AND SUCCESSORS  
AND  
ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

**By Christopher T. Baer**

INTRODUCTION

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The following documents constitute a comprehensive history of the Pennsylvania Railroad, its predecessors and successors, with larger historical context, in the form of a chronology or time line. No comprehensive history of the PRR has been attempted since the Centennial History of Burgess & Kennedy, and the creation of a complete, traditional, literary history in book form seems an impossible task. The chronological format with electronic publishing permits the creation of an open-ended data base with automatic search capabilities. New data can be added to the data base in any order as it is discovered or revised as necessary. The data can never be "complete", but in this form its incompleteness is less problematic.

It is my intention to include data on the following subjects:

- A corporate history covering the creation and dissolution of the many companies in the PRR system.
- A history of construction and abandonments of main lines and principal branches, as well as major stations, bridges, tunnels, shops, and yards, including unbuilt projects.
- An organizational history of the evolution of departments and divisions, with biographical data on certain officials.
- A technological history of changes in motive power, cars, signal systems, testing, computers, etc.
- A business history of relations with major competitors and allies, and a political history of relations with state and federal governments.
- A history of labor relations, wage trends, union organizing and strikes.
- A history of passenger, and to a lesser extent freight, service with dates of first and last service and histories of named or special trains.

The data base begins prior to 1700. The 17th and 18th century portion describes settlement and transportation improvements in what became the PRR heartland, with emphasis on the first big internal improvement projects of the 1780s and 1790s. Starting in 1800, the data base then describes the seaport rivalries and the revived internal improvements movement with a complete history of the Pennsylvania Public Works as well as the other early railroads that found their way into the PRR system. The data base then

covers the history of the PRR and its predecessor companies from the Associates of the Jersey Company of 1804 through the Penn Central merger of 1968 to creation of Conrail in 1976. Future files will carry the history of PRR/Penn Central successors down to the present.

The data base also contains substantial comparative information on the PRR's major competitors and allies. Special attention is given to the New York Central and the New Haven because of their eventual union in Penn Central. Allied lines such as the Lehigh Valley, the Norfolk & Western, the Wabash and the Southern receive less thorough treatment, while the B&O/Reading/Central of New Jersey, which was often the PRR's most fierce competitor, is given somewhat more. In all cases, the emphasis is on those lines and service that competed or connected with the PRR. Only companies in the PRR family receive a full treatment. Information after 1968 covers all of Penn Central, as well as the activities of Amtrak and the various commuter authorities operating over ex-PRR or ex-Penn Central lines. Given the paucity of original documents, coverage of Conrail is relatively weak.

Each year from 1820 to 1876 constitutes a separate document. Prior and later years are covered by documents of five, ten, or more years in length, until the amount of data should become large enough to subdivide them.

The files may be read by scrolling, or by keyword searching using the "binoculars" icon. In this way, it is possible to locate all the references to a particular subject (e.g., the *Broadway Limited*, 30th Street Station, J. Edgar Thomson).

In order to save space, forms of names have been simplified, the word "Company" being dropped wherever practicable. All "ands" within a corporate name are rendered with "&", and "Railroad" is used instead of "Rail Road." However, some archaic spellings such as "Port Deposit," "Patowmack", and "New Jersey Atlantick" have been retained as the official names of early 19th century companies. Frequently recurring names are abbreviated after their initial appearance, such as "B&O," "LIRR," etc. Typically, these are familiar reporting marks. The New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad Company" is always simply the "New Haven," and "the Reading" is used to designate either the Philadelphia & Reading Railroad Company, the Philadelphia & Reading Railway Company, or the Reading Company unless the context requires further qualification. Pennsylvania Station, New York, is always "Penn Station." Persons seeking the proper forms of the corporate names are referred to Coverdale & Colpitts or to original records.

The data base is being offered in what amounts to a series of successive drafts. Generally speaking, it is easier to work through sources in a systematic way rather than collecting the information in chronological order. Numerous errors and contradictions exist among sources, many of which have yet to be corrected. I have tried wherever possible to trace information specific to the PRR to a reliable contemporary source. Information on other railroads is usually taken entirely from secondary sources and annual reports, and general historical information is taken from existing chronologies and textbooks.

As a result of preparing these documents, I have discovered that there is no single, 100% definitive and comprehensive source of PRR information. Minute book entries, laws, court decisions, official reports and proclamations, and individual letters are all accurately dated. Later compilations, however, are only as good as the information available to the compilers, and are subject to errors of transcription, most notoriously in the case of the Watkins history. Even sources as "official" as the *New York Times* and *Railway Age* can give different versions prepared from the same PRR press release. Church's History and the ICC valuation histories often lack accurate information about remote events.

At this point, almost no source has been entered completely, although the bulk of the information in

the major PRR histories of William B. Wilson, Howard W. Schotter, Burgess & Kennedy, and the unpublished history of J. Elfreth Watkins has been almost entirely transcribed, along with over half of Church's History and Coverdale & Colpitts (which is itself draws heavily on Church and the valuation histories). Likewise the bulk of the information in *Mutual Magazine* (1915-74), the *Pennsy* (1951-68), and *Penn Central Post* (1969-76) has been done, along with the PRR Minutes of the Board of Directors and its published annual reports. Most of the data from the annual reports and minutes of the Pennsylvania Board of Canal Commissioners (1825-58) have been entered with the exception of appointments. Substantial information has been entered from files of the PRR Engineering Dept., the system passenger agents notices, and PRR and Penn Central press releases.

Beyond the broad outline given above, the decisions on what to include have been my own. No attempt has been made to include much information that is better presented in the form of tables, graphs or rosters or descriptions of day-to-day operating practices, train consists or the like. Likewise, a lot of important information remains to be input, and there are many corrections to be made. Well-documented corrections or additions are welcome.

Much of the data has been taken from the imprint and archival collections of the Hagley Museum and Library in Greenville, Del. A good portion of the information was collected in the course of appraising and arranging the PRR records at Hagley and at the Merion Avenue records warehouse and in preparing *Railroads and Canals of the Mid-Atlantic States* (Hagley, 1981). The compiler would also like to credit the Pennsylvania State Archives, the Mutual Beneficial Association of Conrail Employees, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the Library Company of Philadelphia, the Delaware Law Library, the Historical Society of Delaware, the Chester County Historical Society, the New Jersey State Archives, the New Jersey State Library, the Lancaster County Historical Society, and the Delaware State Archives. Special thanks go to the staffs of the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania and the National Railway Historical Society Library in Philadelphia, and to John Marshall for sharing his exhaustive compilation of PRR information in the *New York Times* from 1885 to 1929. Al Buchan, John Clark, William J. Coxey, E.T. Francis, Luther Gitte, Herb Harwood, Frank Kozempel, Ray Leneweaver, Paul W. Schopp, Donald E. Shappell, Bill Strassner, Robert Watson and Richard T. Wallis, and the late John Brinckmann and George H. Foster have also contributed advice and materials from their personal collections.