



CENTRE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

CENTRE FURNACE MANSION

1001 East College Avenue ☎ State College, Pennsylvania 16801 ☎ 814.234.4779

January 27, 2009

Danielle Gosselin
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20423

Attention: Environmental Filing
STB Finance Docket No. 35116

Dear Danielle Gosselin,

The Centre County Historical Society wishes to voice its opposition to the construction, operation and reactivation of approximately twenty miles of the former Beech Creek Railroad line between Wallaceton Junction, Clearfield County and Gorton, Centre County by the R.J. Corman Railroad Company/Pennsylvania Lines to serve a new quarry, landfill, and industrial park being developed by Resource Recovery, LLC, near Gorton, Pennsylvania.

Our opposition to this project is based on the potential negative impacts on the rich set of Cultural/Historic Resources in the area.

We believe that this portion of the Beech Creek Railroad District could be considered for National Register eligibility under three criteria: **A** – its impact on settlement patterns and on the area's economic and social development in the transmission of goods and people; **C** – engineering significance; and **D** – it may be likely to yield information important to pre history and history through archaeology.

Criterion A – its impact on settlement patterns and on the area's economic and social development in the transmission of goods and people

This portion of the Beech Creek Railroad, built in 1883-84 across the difficult terrain of the Allegheny Plateau in Centre and Clearfield Counties, was part of the New York Central Railroad system and part of a network of railroad lines that extended from Lycoming to Clearfield Counties and beyond. The initial purpose of the parent company was to reach rich bituminous coal deposits being mined in the area and ship them into New York to meet the growing needs for coal within that state. Later, coke ovens were built and coke was shipped, and then another resource, fire clay was mined, and finished fire bricks also were shipped.

The ruggedness of the terrain had served as a discouragement to the area's early settlement resulting in a very small population, but the railroad provided jobs to thousands of workers, with the mines and related activities providing thousands more. The mining and railroad industries were the source of the region's lifeblood for decades. In addition to drawing from within Centre and Clearfield Counties and the area's existing population, construction companies and mine

owners brought in a sizeable population of immigrants from Eastern Europe and Sweden to build the railroad network and work in area mines. Passenger service also became part of the railroad's operation, which in turn brought visitors to the area and the establishment of a service industry in nearby communities to meet those visitor needs.

Criterion C: Engineering Significance

Deep valleys and fast moving streams divide this region's forested high plateau. Its ruggedness represented a challenge to railroad construction, and overcoming those challenges of difficult terrain represented a significant engineering feat. The Peale Tunnel and the Viaduct and other bridges on this segment of the line offer examples of how the engineering needs of this mountainous region were addressed, as does the way the right-of-way was sliced through the mountains/valleys. Bridges were built and streams crossed, and substantial cut and fill techniques were used.

Peale Tunnel

The P & T Collins Company (Phillip and Thomas Collins) was the subcontractor in charge of building the mountainous sections of the Beech Creek Railroad for which the Peale Tunnel was a part. The Collins name is a significant one in 19th century railroad engineering. With father, Peter, they were involved in the building of the Portage Railroad and the construction of the Portage Tunnel at Gallitzin in the 1850s. Following that, they became active in railroad construction, particularly bridges and tunnels, with the N.Y. Central (the predecessor of the BCRR).

The building of the Peale Tunnel in such a remote area by manual labor was a major accomplishment. Work began on the Tunnel's east end heading on June 30, 1883 and the west heading on July 27. The headings met on the night of October 30, 1883. The track was laid in July 1884. The tunnel is 1,277 feet long; its maximum ceiling height is 20 feet at the entrances. The portals are of cut stone, with the cut stone continuing inside along the walls and ceiling for a short distance at each end. The ceiling is partially lined with brick and covered with a concrete cap (which may have been a later addition.) The remainder of the ceiling is solid rock. Except for the removal of the track and the possible addition of the concrete cap to the brick ceiling portions, it is likely that the tunnel is essentially as it was when completed in 1884. The Peale Tunnel is one of only four railroad tunnels in Centre County, and is by far the longest of the four. It and the nearby community in Clearfield County were named to honor former State Senator S.R. Peale of Lock Haven, a major promoter of the railroad.

In 2004, over \$500,000 of federal Surface Transportation Program Enhancement funding was used to repair the tunnel as part of Snow Shoe Rail Trail Association efforts.

Viaduct Bridge

With the exception of the Peale Tunnel, no other structure along this portion of the Beech Creek Railroad is more impressive than the bridge spanning Moshannon Creek between Centre and Clearfield Counties. Its impressiveness matches the grandeur of the landscape. It is 779 feet long, 119 feet high, with 15 spans supported by eight towers. Construction probably started on the bridge in early 1884, and as it was reported in October of that year, the ironwork was being erected. "The Great Moshannon Viaduct . . . built entirely of iron with the exception of the ties," was opened on November 11. The completion of the bridge permitted track laying to continue, unimpeded, on the Clearfield County side of the Moshannon Creek. Whether or not the Collins Brothers built the original bridge has not been documented, but given the date of construction it is a possibility. However, in 1902-03 a rebuilding program was undertaken. This rebuilding

involved replacing the iron spans with steel plate deck-girders fabricated by American Bridge Company. According to American Bridge, the work started on June 1, 1902 and was completed on July 11, 1903. The project involved 15 spans, the longest (the one over the creek itself) being 100 feet long and 10 feet high. The only changes to the rebuilt bridge, other than periodic tie renewals and the removal of the track rails in 1994, has been the walkway and railing rehabilitation. Until 1984, wooden walkways and railings had been present on both sides of the track. That year the walkways and railings were removed and a steel galvanized walkway and railing were installed but only on the west side of the track.

Other Historic Resources

Smaller stone arched bridges were built to accommodate the railroad line crossings of creeks and runs. All have robust cut stone abutments and winged walls, probably dating back to the railroad line's original construction in 1883-84. Beginning in 1902-1903, all were upgraded, with work completed by 1912. Other than periodic renewals and removal of the rails in 1994, all are essentially unchanged from their early twentieth century upgrades.

Tipples, stone culverts, mile markers and other historic features can be found along this segment of the Beech Creek Railroad.

Town of Peale

Bids for building this town, located along the Clearfield/Centre County line, began in 1883 and by the end of the year 100 houses had been built to accommodate approximately 2000 residents, most of them working in the mines. Peale's passenger station, a two story building, was located on the Centre County side of Moshannon Creek and served as a regular stop for passenger service into the 1920s. Passenger service ended in 1933.

Criterion D: May be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history

Portions of the town of Peale should be included in an archaeological survey, especially if there is an improvement to the access road, via Peale Road, resulting in the potential disturbance of an area greater than the railroad right-of-way.

Another location for archaeological consideration is at the Gorton end of the BCRR – the width of the railroad right-of-way at this location may be considerably wider than what was originally considered as an area of impact. Although no buildings appear on the 1959 USGS map (which clearly illustrates the siding location), it is highly possible that reuse of the rail line may disrupt a greater footprint than initially implied.

Impacts on Historic and Archaeological Resources

The Peale Tunnel and Viaduct Bridge, as well as other stone arched bridges along the railroad right-of-way will need to undergo repairs before railroad service can be reactivated. Given their historic importance, supporting documentation from a structural engineer and an historian would be essential to determine what repairs are needed and to assure that any repairs, including those to meet modern-day railroad standards, be made without altering the dimensions and structural appearance of these engineering marvels.

To avoid the potential destruction of archaeological resource information, a Phase I cultural assessment of archaeological sites should be undertaken in the Peale and Gorton areas, and elsewhere as determined.

In addition, there is evidence from prior research that traffic vibration can severely impact the structural integrity of nearby structures, possibly putting other nearby historic industrial features such as a railroad siding tipple in jeopardy.

Cumulative and Indirect Impacts

In addition to potential negative impacts on these historic resources through the actual reactivation of the railroad, the Centre County Historical Society opposes this project because of the way in which these industrial heritage sites will be lost or compromised by the negative impacts of other conflicting uses. We have recommended to the Centre County Planning and Community Development Office that this area and these sites be noted in Centre County's historic preservation plan.

We believe that the project will have major negative impacts on heritage tourism, and particularly impact a state-wide effort to recognize and promote Pennsylvania's industrial heritage across its northern tier by:

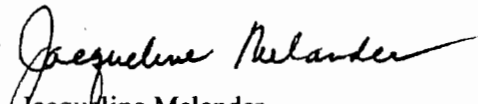
- undermining recreational efforts and facilities in the Moshannon State Forest
- undermining the efforts of the Snow Shoe Rail Trail Association's facility owned by the Headwaters Charitable Trust that utilizes a large portion of the identified rail line proposed for reactivation.

And we believe that there are potential threats from future environmentally destructive development that will likely spur from the railroad activity, putting the rich historic resources and the heritage tourism opportunities of the region at irreplaceable risk.

For these reasons, the Centre County Historical Society recommends denial of the R.J. Corman Railroad Co./Pennsylvania Lines request to construct, operate, and reactivate the former Beech Creek Railroad line between Wallaceton Junction, Clearfield County and Gorton, Centre County to serve a new quarry, landfill, and industrial park. This recommendation is in keeping with the Centre County Historical Society's mission statement that includes "to mark and help preserve and protect . . . historical sites and landscapes,"

The engineering scale and scope in the building of this part of the Beech Creek Railroad, the vastness and remoteness of the wilderness in which it was built, and the role played by immigrant workers in helping to tame that wilderness offers a remarkable story. The Centre County Historical Society believes that this project is not in the best interests of preserving that story, nor in protecting and sharing this historic landscape and these historic resources with current and future citizens and visitors.

Sincerely,


Jacqueline Melander
President

Enclosure: 1/27/09 Letter and Recommendations to Douglas Dinsmore, Skelly and Loy,
Related to Pennsylvania Historic Resource Survey Form for Beech Creek Railroad



CENTRE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

CENTRE FURNACE MANSION

1001 East College Avenue ☎ State College, Pennsylvania 16801 ☎ 814.234.4779

January 27, 2009

Douglas Dinsmore, Ph.D.
Cultural Resource Specialist
Skelly and Loy, Inc.
2601 North Front Street
Harrisburg, PA 17110-1185

Dear Doug Dinsmore,

Enclosed is a set of recommendations from the Centre County Historical Society for changes in the Pennsylvania Historic Resource Survey form for the Beech Creek Railroad, submitted by Skelly and Loy October 9, 2008.

The recommendations focus, for the most part, on four main points:

- Expand the district boundaries to include the right-of-way from Jersey Shore, Lycoming County to Mahaffey, Clearfield County.
- Provide more contextual information in the Historical Narrative section on the historic resources
- Add Criteria D in the Evaluation -- Need for an Archaeological Survey
- Reevaluate the risk of threats to historic resources

Given the significance of the role this railroad played in the development history of this part of Pennsylvania, and given the significance of the historic resources that remain, another approach might be to submit two separate National Register nominations.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Melander
President

cc: Danielle Gosselin, Surface Transportation Board
Douglas C. McLearen, Bureau for Historic Preservation

**PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL RESOURCE FORM
BEECH CREEK RAILROAD**

**Recommended Changes to Submission by
Douglas Dinsmore – Skelly and Loy, Inc.**

IDENTIFICATION AND LOCATION

- **Extend Survey District Boundaries – Integrity of Beech Creek Railroad Right-of-way**
Extend Linear Survey District Boundaries of the Beech Creek Railroad right-of-way from Jersey Shore, Lycoming County to Mahaffey, Clearfield County

Given that most of the railroad bed remains intact between Jersey Shore, Lycoming County through Centre County to Mahaffey, Clearfield County (noted in the Physical Description section), focusing only on a segment of the Beech Creek Railroad bed defined by the proposed use seems arbitrary and misrepresents the importance and integrity of the historical features that are beyond the segment that this survey addresses.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

- **Include the Historic Features along Extended Right-of-Way**

List all of the historic features along the BCRR right-of-way, adding to those you have already listed. For example in Centre County: the Hogback Tunnel; all bridges, including the bridge over PA Railroad's Sugar Camp Branch at Gillentown (built by the Collins Brothers to span another railroad instead of a stream), ones at Rock Run and Black Moshannon Creeks; stone markers; culverts; etc.,

Expand on the description of the remains of Clearfield County's town of Peale.

- **Expand Information on Terrain/Area Land Features**

While the rugged terrain and the engineering achievements of the Allegheny Front when the railroad was built are noted, information about its present day appearance should be included, such as in Centre County: forested wilderness, deep valleys, fast moving streams, Moshannon State Forest and nearby Moshannon Park, etc.

- **Expand/Clarify Statement about Use of Coke**

"The BCRR also carried coke for the construction and repair of the locomotives . . . " It also should be noted that coke was used to fire furnaces for the making of steel that was used for construction and repair.

- **Location of Communities**

Since many of the communities referenced are small, be more explicit in locating them by putting them into a geographic context, i.e., "Groton, Centre County."

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

- **Provide Historical Narrative with Historic Resources for Extended Railroad Line**
- **Provide Geographic Locations of Communities**

- **Historic Significance of Work Force**

An enlarged work force obviously made the development of this area possible, including the influx of immigrants. Expand upon this part of the story. For example, *The Collins force of 135 Italian laborers building the Bellefonte and Buffalo Run Railroad will soon be transferred to Snow Shoe to work on the railroad there.* Democratic Watchman, April 20, 1883.

And from a contemporary point of view, the influence of immigrants from Eastern Europe still is a factor in Centre County's Mountaintop communities, reflected for example in the churches in the area and their membership.

- **Additional Information on Peale Tunnel**

Correction – beginning construction date: 1883 (instead of 1833)

More information on the Collins and their significance: With father, Peter, they were involved in the building of the Portage Railroad and the construction of the Portage Tunnel at Gallitzin (certainly a forerunner of Peale.) And, following that, they became involved in railroad construction, particularly bridges and tunnels, with the N.Y. Central.

The building of the Peale Tunnel in such a remote area by manual labor was a major accomplishment.

Include a close-up photograph showing the cut stone entrances.

Tunnel and nearby town named to honor former State Senator S.R. Peale of Lock Haven, a major promoter of the railroad.

- **Information on Hogback Tunnel**

Comparison with Peale Tunnel

Built at the same time -- local newspaper references

Large force of men working on the new railroad at Hogback, about 12 miles above Beech Creek. Meanwhile, Tom Collins' gang of men is at work at Hurxthal's summit near Snow Shoe, where a 40-foot cut is required to run the railroad under the Pennsylvania Railroad's Snow Shoe line.

Bellefonte Republican, August 23 & 30, 1882

- **Additional Information on Viaduct Bridge**

Expand upon its significance – along with the Peale Tunnel, certainly this bridge, spanning Moshannon Creek between Centre and Clinton Counties, represents one of the two most outstanding engineering structures in the Centre County portion of the BCRR right-of-way. The Viaduct's 779 feet in length, 119 feet in height, along with its 15 spans supported by eight towers represents an impressive piece of engineering in this mountainous region.

Given its initial construction date in October, 1884, "The Great Moshannon Viaduct . . . built entirely of iron with the exception of the ties," and opened on November 11, could this also have been a Collins project?

Rebuilding by the American Bridge Co., and completed on July 11, 1903, it involved 15 spans, the longest (the one over the creek itself) was 100 feet long and 10 feet high. The only changes to the periodic tie renewals and the removal of the track rails in 1994, has been the walkway and

railing rehabilitation. Until 1984, wooden walkways and railings had been present on both sides of the track. That year the walkways and railings were removed and a steel galvanized walkway and railing were installed but only on the west side of the track.

Old photographs suggest that the bridge was an attraction to passenger train tourists and locals.

What comparisons can be made with still existing and no longer standing iron railroad bridges: are there others of this size nearby or elsewhere in PA? How does this Viaduct Bridge compare with the Kinzua Viaduct in McKean County, now destroyed, that was built in the same period,

- **More Information about Town of Peale**

How did the town of Peale serve the railroad?

What role did S. R. Peale play in the laying out of the town?

Why was it a Swedish settlement? Were there other communities along the BCRR with immigrants coming from Sweden rather than Eastern Europe?

What buildings were there – flag station, housing, school, etc.? There are maps reflecting the layout of the town, and photographs are available.

What evidence remains that would provide an industrial archaeology perspective and further substantiate Peale's involvement with the railroad? The railroad right-of-way is 200-feet wide at this location and future activity could adversely impact below grade remains.

- **Other Historic Resources**

Bridges, tipples, stone culverts, mile markers have been identified within the segment that this resource survey form addresses, but there are others all along the right-of-way that should be included. In Centre County, for example, in addition to the Hogback Tunnel there are bridges at Rock Run and Black Moshannon Creeks, and the Collins Brothers-designed bridge over the PA Railroad's Sugar Camp Branch at Gillentown.

EVALUATION

- **Criteria List**

Add Criteria D – . . . “may be likely to yield information important to history . . . “

Strongly recommend the need for an archaeological survey as part of the potential National Register listing of the BCRR.

Portions of the town of Peale should be included in a survey, especially if there is an improvement to the access road, via Peale Road, resulting in the potential disturbance of an area greater than the railroad right-of-way.

Another location for possible archaeological consideration is at the Gorton end of the BCRR – the width of the railroad right-of-way at this location may be considerably wider than what was originally considered as an area of impact. Although no buildings appear on the 1959 USGS map (which clearly illustrates the siding location), it is highly possible that reuse of the rail line may disrupt a greater footprint than implied by this historic resource survey material.

THREATS

• Private Development – #3

The statement that the Beech Creek Railroad would be returned to its historic use as a rail carrier without threats to these resources minimizes the potential impact on historic and archaeological resources in several ways.

• Peale Tunnel – Viaduct Bridge

How minor would 'minor repairs' be in order to reincorporate these historic resources into the railroad's operation?

What impact would modern-day standards have on these historic resources? For example, can the Peale Tunnel and the Viaduct Bridge be reused without altering their dimensions and structural appearance?

Would necessary repairs respect the historic and engineering significance of these two resources? Would, for example, the railroad gauge be the same; would the trains be sized in accordance with the tunnel's width and height; would the weight not exceed what the bridge could handle?

To say that there is no threat to the railroad right-of-way and these associated engineering marvels would require supporting documentation prepared by an accredited structural engineer and historian.

• Other Historic Resources, Including Town of Peale, Hogback Tunnel, Other Bridges

Would the relaying of track result in wider clearances in order to accommodate modern day heavy equipment and if so, would this widening impact the close-by archaeological resources?

Would remaining evidence of Peale be impacted?

Other industrial resources that remain along the right-of-way. There is evidence from prior research that traffic vibration can severely impact the structural integrity of nearby buildings. In Centre County, for example, the coal tipple and other nearby industrial sites could be in jeopardy.

• Potential Threats from Future Development

The possibility of other activities that will likely spur from railroad activity – what impacts might they have on these historic resources?

Recommendations from:

Jacqueline Melander, President
Centre County Historical Society
1001 East College Avenue
State College, PA 16801
melander@uplink.net