

Did the O&W ever operate trains in the Lehigh Valley? "I don't think so..."

By Peter Putman

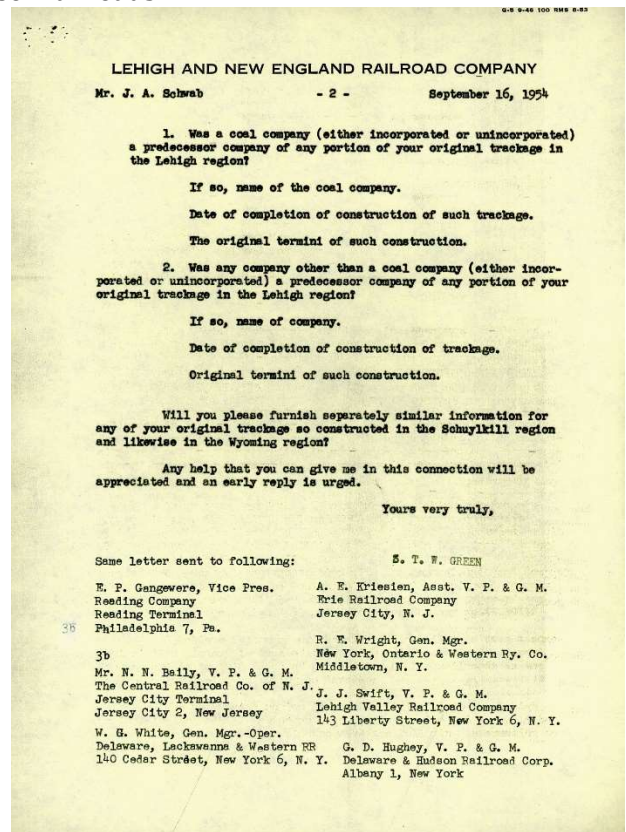
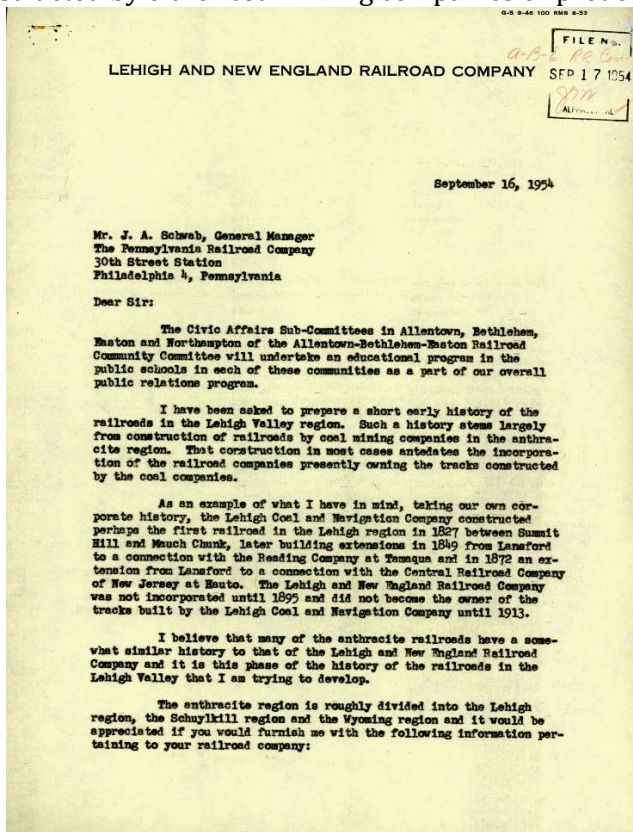
Around 30 years ago, I was friendly with a fellow parent in the YMCA Indian Guides program. One day, he mentioned casually that he had a lot of "old railroad papers and memorabilia" because his wife's grandfather "was once president of a railroad in Allentown" and "did I have any interest in the papers because I'd like to get rid of them?"

I had just started scouting locations for the Steamtown NHS visitor center film and already had a growing collection of memorabilia from the O&W, Lackawanna, and other roads. "Sure!" I replied. "Happy to take all of it off your hands!"

Turns out; his wife's maiden name was Green. And her grandfather was Severn Teakel Wallis Green, a/k/a S.T.W. Green, the last president of the Lehigh & New England Railroad (originally the Philadelphia, Poughkeepsie & Boston Railroad, among other names). My friend's son was named Severn in honor of his great-grandfather.

Among a bunch of old railroad magazines, office correspondence, and an auction flyer for the L&NE property and equipment – the road shut down in 1961, even though still profitable, but revenue was rapidly declining – was a folder with letters to and from various railroads in the area...and some far beyond.

It appears Mr. Green was planning to create an educational program on the history of railroading in the Lehigh Valley for students in area public schools. On September 16, 1954, he dispatched letters to the general managers of the Central of New Jersey, Reading, and Lehigh Valley to obtain background historical information for his project. Green's focus in his initial inquiry was on railroads that had originally been constructed by either coal mining companies or predecessor railroads.



But he didn't stop with those roads, also firing off queries to the Pennsylvania, Lackawanna, Delaware & Hudson, Erie, and - believe it or not - the O&W. (Green apparently overlooked the Lehigh & Hudson River.) While the Pennsy didn't have any footprint in the Valley, even though it did gain control of the LV in 1931, the Lackawanna did. Of course, the Erie did not operate any trains past the coal fields around Wilkes-Barre. And the O&W didn't venture south of its connection with the LV at Sibley Junction.

His letter of 9/16 was addressed to R.E. Wright, General Manager, inquiring about O&W train operations in the Lehigh and Schuylkill valleys. Green received a reply from Wright on September 21, 1954, stating "...It is my understanding that no part of our railway is located in the Lehigh, Schuylkill, or Wyoming regions, but is located in the Lackawanna Valley in Scranton." Wright was also kind enough to enclose a straight-line map of the O&W trackage to clear things up.

Whether Wright was not 100% sure about the extent of O&W operations in Pennsylvania or was simply being extremely formal in his reply isn't known. Follow-up correspondence from Green on September 23, 1954 includes an apology, to wit: "I am sorry we used a generally-known local name which was intended to embrace the northern anthracite coal field." Green goes on to ask, "...Would you please furnish the information on that portion of your line in that district, namely, in the Scranton and Sibley Jct. area?"

Wright's second reply from September 24 states that, "No coal company (either incorporated or unincorporated) was a predecessor company of any portion of our original trackage in this district." Wright goes on to describe the origins of the Ontario, Carbondale & Scranton Railroad Company (1889) and the O&W branch to Sibley Junction (1906).

Technically speaking, the OC&S could fairly be described as a "predecessor" company, as it was chartered for the express purpose of building the line south from Cadosia to Scranton, absorbing the Scranton & Forest City Railroad Company, Forest City & State Line Railroad Company, and Hancock & Pennsylvania Railroad Company along the way. (The OC&S also built the line to Sibley Junction.) The O&W leased the entire road in 1890.

