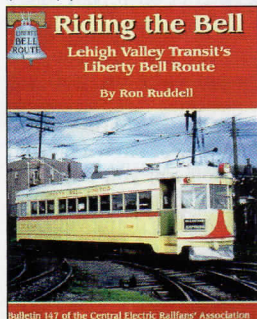




Book Review

CERA Bulletin 147 by Ron Ruddell; Central Electric Railfans' Association, P.O. Box 503, Chicago, IL 60690; www.cera-chicago.org; 312/987-4391; 226 pages, hardbound, numerous illustrations; \$65.00 postage included (USA) plus sales tax where applicable.



One of the many benefits of living in Northeast Pennsylvania is having a whole batch of abandoned railroads to study and explore. I love mainline railroading in all it's glory just like the next guy. But there is just something about

grabbing a set of topographic maps and heading out into the countryside in search of the remnants of a long-abandoned railroad or two.

Over the years I have followed a fair portion of the Lehigh Valley Transit line, the famous interurban route that ran from Allentown, Pa., right down to Philadelphia. Passing through some of this area's nicest scenery, the LVT is still sorely missed some 65 years after its abandonment.

For a railroad that's been gone so long you would be surprised at how much there is still left to see — bridge abutments, fills, cuts and at least four depots. LVT car 1030 is alive and well at the world-class Seashore Trolley Museum in Kennebunkport, Maine.

All that is great, but there is so much more to the LVT than what awaits the would-be railroad archaeologist. It was a very fascinating line in its time and, until now, there hadn't been a comprehensive study of this railroad in print. Oh sure, there are a handful of smaller books that have some great information. But you know what I mean — I've been hoping and waiting for a long time for someone to write the book on the Lehigh Valley Transit.

Thankfully, Ron Ruddell and the good people at the Central Electric Railfans' Association have remedied that most grievous of errors with this massive, comprehensive, and well-illustrated masterwork. And it's a book that was well worth the wait.

Our author starts us off with an overview of the various players that helped create the idea of a Lehigh Valley-based traction line. Things started back in 1893 when the Allentown & Lehigh Valley Traction Company was created by investor Albert Johnson. We read of the individual entrepreneurs, good men like Johnson, businessmen and visionaries that came together to build a line that connected this ever-growing area that desperately needed a viable connection to Philadelphia and environs.

Through trials and tribulations, mergers, receivership, and showdowns with bondholders, somehow the railroad that would come to be known as the Lehigh Valley Transit was able to press on and grow steadily each year. The early history of this line and the various dramas inherent make for some really fascinating (and far from dry) reading.

The LVT grew stronger each year, adding mileage, building connections with other traction lines, and filling a very real need for reliable rail transportation in the region. Things were going great until World War I and the various shortage of materials that came with it. The LVT was forced to do more with less and it ended the war in "hurting pup" mode.

After the war was no picnic, either. By the 1920s the LVT started seeing sales of automobiles cut into its heretofore near-monopoly on area passenger traffic. Roads were paved, cars were made more reliable, suburban routes were converted from trolley car to bus and the LVT started to run into some serious trouble.

Things were looking bad indeed for the Route of the Liberty Bell. Enter a massive plot twist in the form of a 1933 report that called for a new and improved LVT, one that could fight back handily against the seemingly unstoppable growth of the personal automobile.

Unlike most of the other interurban railroads of the day, LVT batted down and chose to give the enemy a run for its money. By buying hardly-used lightweight equipment from lines like the Cincinnati & Lake Erie, the LVT had literally decided to "go big or go home." By 1938 or so, the LVT was the darling of the industry, a veritable "comeback kid." I found this part of the book to be extremely interesting as the author manages to write in a style that both informs and entertains. Great stuff here and you almost feel like you are there!

Alas, World War II put a crimp on things and any improvements to the bottom line proved to be only fleeting. By 1947, traffic was down dramatically, the equipment and right-of-way were beat up, and the only way out was the inevitable conversion to rubber-tired buses. "Boo and hiss" to be sure, but this part of the story is very intriguing as well, and you can see that the railroad certainly didn't go down without a fight.

The year 1949 saw the end of through passenger service from Allentown to Red Arrow's 69th Street Terminal in Upper Darby, just outside Philadelphia. The resultant forced change of cars in Norristown saw what little bit of traffic was left plummet. By this time it was all over but the crying and the painful but inevitable end came in the early hours of September 7, 1951.

The scrappers went to work literally the next day and that was the end of the Liberty Bell Route. Thankfully, this book finally does the line the justice it deserves. Heavily illustrated with both black & white and color photos, along with some truly exceptional maps of the entire line, I found this book to be well worth the modest asking price. It makes for several hours of enjoyable reading and belongs on any thinking man's bookshelf.

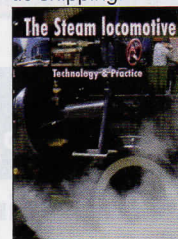
You can't go back in time, but you can go on a trip down Sentimental Avenue and that'll have to do for now. Pick up a copy of this book along with the two most-excellent LVT DVDs that John Pechulis recently released, pour yourself a stiff drink of your favorite beverage, and you'll be taken back to a kinder, gentler time when speedy, safe, economical rail transportation was the way to get around.

A more detailed, well-written study of this most interesting Pennsylvania traction

heavyweight you're not likely to find. Kudos to Ron Ruddell and the CERA for whipping up one of the most interesting and enjoyable books you're bound to read this year! — FRANK GARON

Video Review

The Steam Locomotive: Technology & Practice, distributed by Bob Bernier of Country Trains, P.O. Box 250, Ellerslie, MD 21529-0250; 301/759-3605; cmfrr@aol.com. DVD only, 2 hours 40 minutes, \$39.95 includes free domestic shipping.



I will be the first to admit that I was not much of a steam fan until several months ago. It took Nickel Plate 765 coming to town last summer to really make me sit up and take notice of just what made steam so magical and intriguing. Throw in a weekend chasing Reading & Northern 425 and a

subsequent chance meeting with Carl Franz at the Gaithersburg, Md., railroadiana show last fall and I had no choice but to admit that I, too, was a card-carrying steam aficionado.

No matter whether you're one who lives to breathe their next lungful of coal smoke or someone who has just a passing interest in steam, you are bound to be blown away once you watch this disk. This DVD is so well done, so entertaining, and so informative that you will have no choice but to head out trackside in desperate search of your nearest coal-powered locomotive.

The action starts with a few minutes of history (the Stephenson *Rocket* and the like) and then it's right into a great explanation of the main components of a steam locomotive. Smoke box, boiler and firebox are all covered in great detail that maintains the perfect balance between too much information for a novice and too little information for a hard-core steam nut.

Next it's on to watch a firebox being built, along with how to assemble a boiler for fun and profit. One of the things I most enjoyed in this DVD happens right in this segment — we get to see all the complicated machinery that goes into building things like boilers, flues and such. When you stop and think about the *Rocket* being built way back in 1839 and the level of "technology" that was around then to build it, you really get an appreciation for how far we've come in railroad-ing and how fast.

The information comes at a very enjoyable clip as we learn about such varied topics as:

- Where that much-loved exhaust "beat" comes from and the science behind it.
- What a blower does and when and why you want to make sure you turn it on.
- How things like pistons, eccentric cranks, and safety valves work to help a locomotive go forward or reverse (and help it to not explode!).
- Why there are different driver sizes and how come there are different wheel arrangements.
- The science behind firing a steam locomotive.
- How frames and drivers are cast.

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