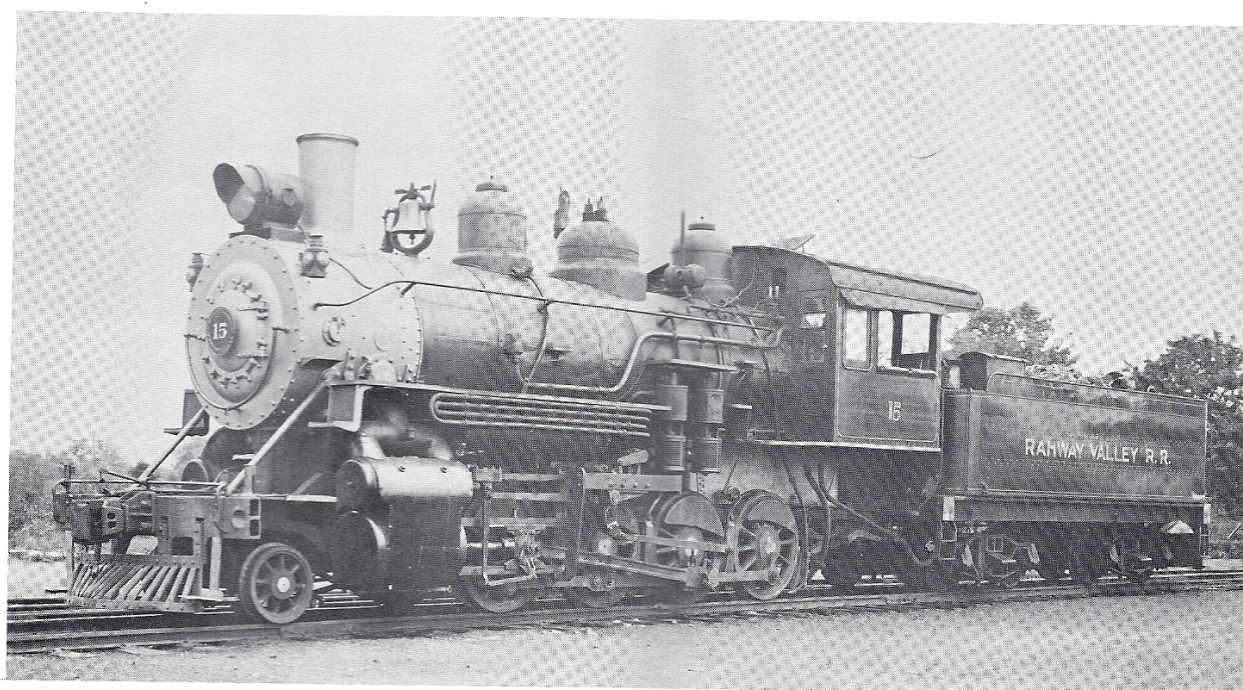


# THE STORY OF NUMBER 15

VALVES: *Piston*

ADMISSION: *Outside*



Donald W. Furler

Resplendent in new paint and trim, Baldwin-built No. 15 was posed for this classic photograph

shortly after her arrival on New Jersey's 15-mile Rahway Valley. The date: May 15, 1938

THE SMALL ENGINE had been battling the grade and sharp curves for some time when the visiting master mechanic from New Jersey got down off the left-hand seatbox, glanced at the steam gauge above the sloping backhead, and peered into the firebox. He couldn't see much of a fire; in fact, the grates were almost uncovered. Yet despite the long and narrow dimensions of a "cursed" type firebox, the 70-ton Consolidation he was riding had built up a good head of steam and was handling an ample load with obvious effort but seeming ease.

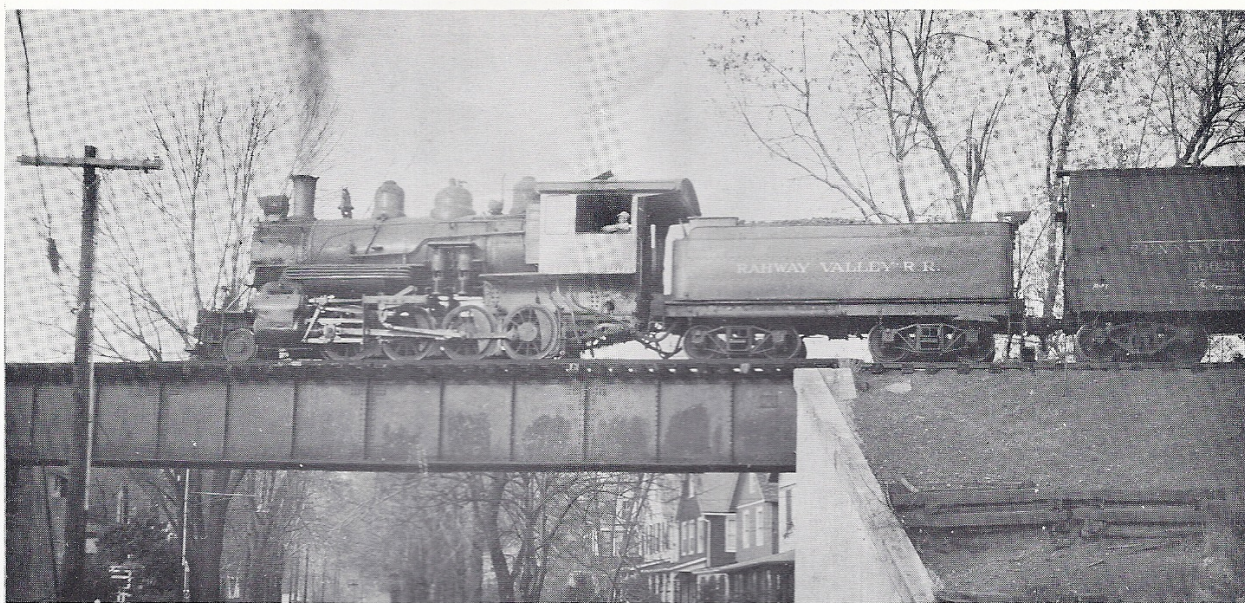
That was Charles William Nees' first encounter with Oneida & Western No. 20, then (1937) with 21 years of Tennessee mountain service already behind her—and it sold him. In due time the unusual little Baldwin became Nees' charge as No. 15 of New Jersey's Rahway Valley R.R. An unusual engine? By either practical or purely esthetic standards, yes.

The 2-8-0 was turned out by Baldwin as Oneida & Western R.R. No. 20 in June, 1916, and delivered into the care of Master Mechanic J. F. Ashworth at Oneida, Tenn. At that time Oneida & Western was but three years old and was still pushing track over an improbable, tortuous route toward Jamestown, 37 miles out and destined to be the road's unreach goal for a full decade. (Intended to develop coal and timber properties, O&W never lived up to an early promise that it would "extend 100 miles from Oneida".)

For a low-wheeler, the straight-top-boilered No. 20 was an extraordinarily well proportioned engine. Narrow firebox or no, she performed well for those who knew how to handle her, and became the favorite of her regular O&W engineer.

It was on the O&W, after a few years, that the 2-8-0 acquired a most uncommon characteristic: outside-admission piston valves. The historical





↑ CROSSING BRIDGE at Summit, No. 15  
nears top of 2.7-mile climb through Wat-  
chung hills with grades reaching 3 percent

↓ "SUMMIT FLYER" heads up locally famed  
Tinkettle Hill out of Kenilworth. Record  
for Tinkettle, with running start: 38 cars





details are obscure. No. 20 had been built with Walschaerts motion and standard balanced slide valves. One cold night, so the story goes, the cylinders froze and the bridges were broken. Further hearsay credits the rebuild job to Eddystone and gives the year as 1926.

Whatever the circumstances, No. 20 was fitted with new piston valves. Outside admission was employed to avoid altering the valve gear, and the cylinder bores were increased by one inch. Of course, it was common practice to retain the old style admission on engines refitted with Universal valve chests. But for one with new half-saddles it was an unusual feature. And the use of outside steam pipes which branched above the valve chests made No. 20 a unique locomotive indeed.

By this means C&W got an expediently improved engine—though with the continued but minor disadvantage of full steam pipe pressure at the valve glands. And there were other modifications for the 20: power reverse (Franklin Type B Ragonet) and a mechanical lubricator were applied probably at the time of rebuilding, a standard steel pilot replaced the original wooden weed-parter, and oil illumination gave way to an electric headlight and markers.

By 1937 C&W had become interested in larger power. It was also in trusteeship (abandonment would come eventually, in 1954) and probably eager to sell surplus equipment. So No. 20 made her last trip along the ruggedly beautiful gorge of the South Fork of the Cumberland River, and in August '37, through the agency of Birmingham Rail & Locomotive Co. and after an approving inspection by Carl Nees, she went to New Jersey as No. 15.

RV President George A. Clark had decided that more power was needed after business picked up so much that for a time the 15-mile suburban-area switching road was obliged to work two engines. After using a variety of small power the RV had settled on 2-8-0's, of which it already owned

three at the time of No. 15's arrival. One of these, No. 12, an ex-Bessemer & Lake Erie engine, was a shade too large for the road and hadn't been used in years. The others, 13 and 14, were a stubby deckless pair from the Lehigh & New England—and real workhorses.

Matched against these twins, No. 15 came off third in performance. Everybody agreed that she was a well fitted engine. But when it came to crew preferences, the older deckless engines were more powerful and had semi-wide fireboxes—and their closed cabs were warmer in winter. For a long time No. 15 was used sparingly during the cold months.

Not everyone could stoke the new arrival successfully. Her design called for a clean but light fire, something never achieved without care.

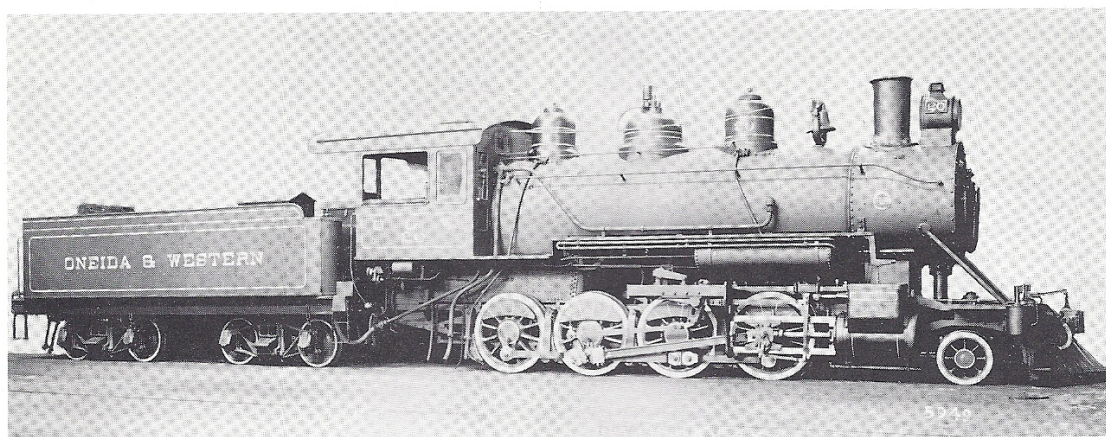
Even so, the handsome Consolidation remained the master mechanic's pet and the favorite of most observers. Her charms were even audible, in a clean exhaust and a melodious whistle on which Engineer Frank Froat could sound either muted, low tones or higher, louder notes of urgency. The admirers of that whistle are many, and Carl Nees, a man not given to oversentiment, always liked to tell how beautifully its notes echoed among the mountains of Tennessee.

The need to use two engines at one time seldom arose during the 15's career on the RV. With traffic on the upswing, though, it was more important than ever to have a spare on hand when one of the three regulars was away for shopping. No. 15 made one trip to the Lackawanna's shops at Scranton, Pa., but most major repairs were performed in New Jersey at that road's Kingsland facility or the Jersey Central's Elizabethport shops.

The two deckless engines and the 15 continued as RV's regular power until a 70-ton diesel was purchased in January, 1951. Thereafter No. 15 still did occasional relief duty. Her last job, almost two years later, was a four-day stint while



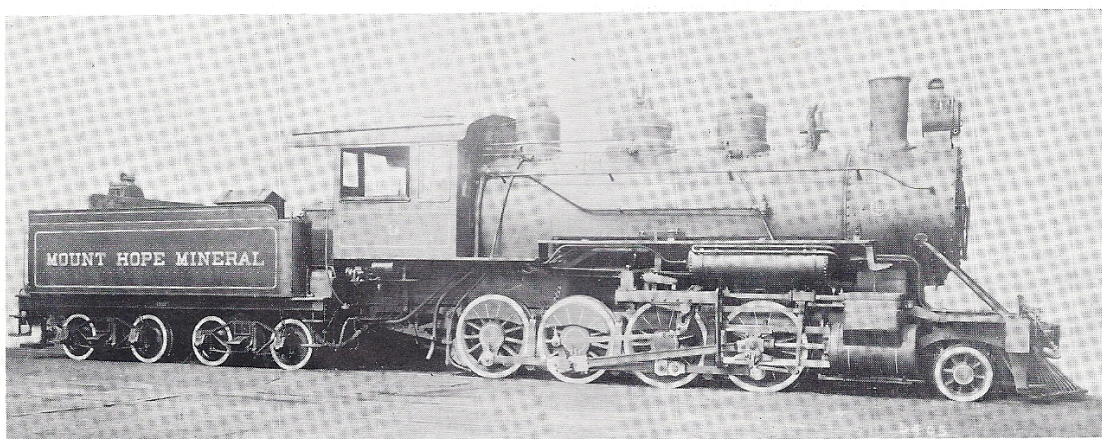




*from original Baldwin negative, collection of H. L. Broadbelt*

LOOK ALIKES • Ironically enough, the only other engine generally known to have been built to the same plans as Oneida & Western No. 20 went to a Jersey short-line not 30 miles from the Rahway Valley. Mount Hope Mineral R.R. No. 3 preceded O&W 20 by a year and differed in minor details,

e.g., double-riveted mud ring, lower working pressure, steel pilot, mechanical lubricator as original equipment, smaller tender. The Mount Hope Mineral was taken over by Jersey Central in 1930; what happened to its No. 3 has never been satisfactorily explained.



ONEIDA & WESTERN NO. 20  
(Baldwin #43529, 6-1916)

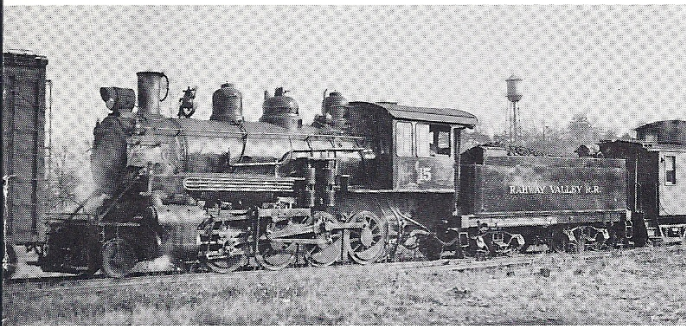
Cylinders	19x26; rebld. 20x26
Drivers	50
Pressure	200
Tractive Effort	31,900; rebld. 35,360
Weight	141,700
Tender	5000 gal., 10 tons

MOUNT HOPE MINERAL NO. 3  
(Baldwin #42076, 5-1915)

Cylinders	19x26
Drivers	50
Pressure	190
Tractive Effort	30,300
Weight	141,700
Tender	3500 gal., 6 tons

TYPE 2-8-0, BALDWIN CLASS 10-32-E, STRAIGHT TOP BOILER





LAST DAY under steam: Nov. 28, 1953

the diesel was down for repairs. It ended on Nov. 28, 1953, and with it ended the steam era on the Rahway Valley. A few weeks later a second diesel was delivered.

That is not quite the end of the story. President Clark, who knew a good engine when he saw one, was as reluctant as anybody to see No. 15 go

for scrap. Pending developments, the engine remained well protected in a closed and heated shed, part of the diesel shop.

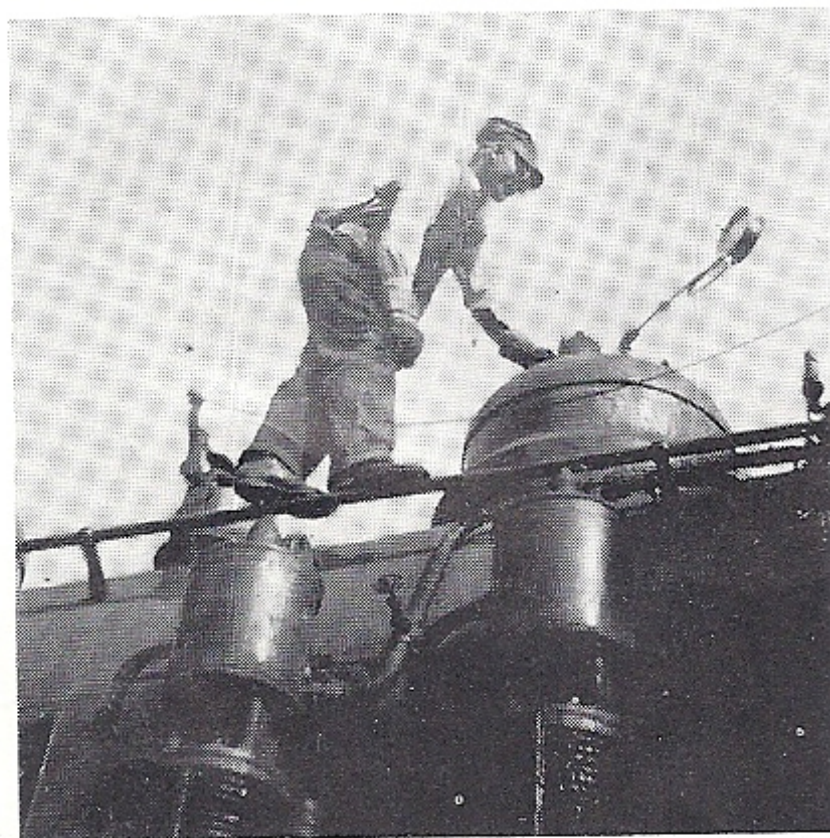
In due time F. Nelson Blount, president of Edaville R.R., became interested in the 15. After it was arranged that Edaville would operate a railroad at the new Pleasure Island park in Wakefield, Mass., and purchase a number of engines for display there, No. 15 was chosen as one of the exhibits. Last June 5, after her steel-archbar tender trucks were cleared for interline movement, the 15 finally left RV rails and traveled via Jersey Central - Delaware & Hudson - Boston & Maine to a new and well-earned place in the public eye.

Today you can go to Pleasure Island and see the remarkable low-wheeler with the outside-admission spool valves. No. 15 has long since lost the spoked pony wheels, solid-pane windows and other frills that she had 20 years ago. But to most eyes she's still one of the best-looking in her class.

You'll probably get to hear that beautiful whistle on another Edaville engine, too. Nelson Blount knows about it.



For this initial number's second feature, on Rahway Valley 2-8-0 No. 15, the editor dipped into his own recollections of a favorite engine, reviving an acquaintance that goes back almost 20 years and involves engine, railroad and personalities. One valued friend on the Rahway Valley was the late Carl Nees, who died in 1950



*Carl Nees at work*