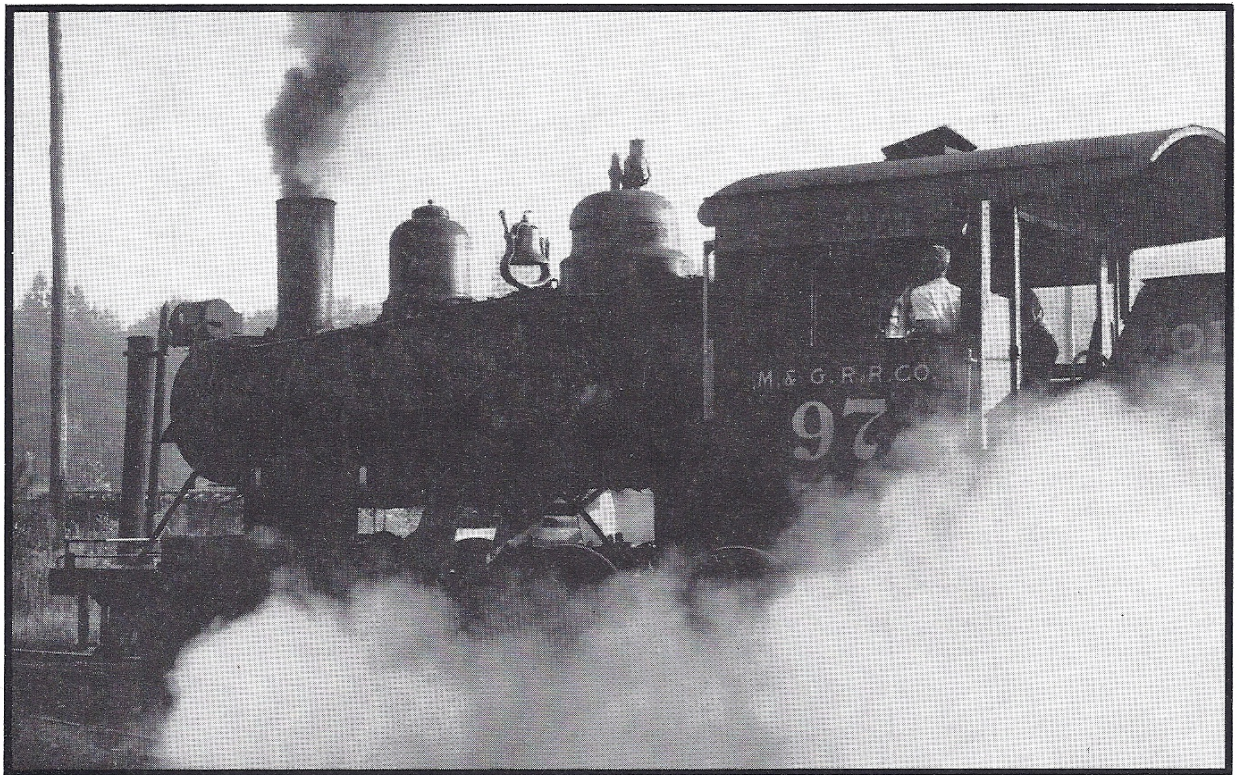


Railroading



Number 28 • June 1969

Short-Line Man

As hard as this world sits on its individualists, it has never been able to stifle them, but they are becoming harder to find in the short-line railroad business. George Arthur Clark, who died on April 7th in the office at Kenilworth, N. J., where he had worked for 37 years as—simultaneously—president, general manager, secretary, auditor, and freight traffic manager of the 15-mile Rahway Valley, was a short-line railroader in the tradition of Dan Thomas of the Chesapeake Western, John Sexton of the Eureka Nevada, and Hardshell Higgins of the mythical Happy Valley Line (who, as readers of the *Railroad Stories* of the Thirties will recall, was the Engine Picture Kid's father-in-law). After George Clark's funeral, two of his friends stood on a street corner for an hour, remembering what they could of him. They agreed that it was the end of an era.

George A. Clark was 19 when he came to the Rahway Valley, and 68 when he died. He was a big, awkward, disheveled man, moody and tempestuous, reflexively profane and ribaldly humorous, and he knew himself better than most of us do. "I'm an outspoken man," he told an interviewer once. "I say what I think, and some people like me for it and other people hate me for it." We liked him for it, and his willingness to tolerate a 12-year-old's hanging around the property had everything to do with the fact that we are now publishing a magazine about railroads. During the nearly 30 years that we knew him, as the population of communities on the Rahway Valley doubled or tripled, that part of New Jersey, only 15 miles from Manhattan, became so built up and paved over as to be unrecognizable to a former resident. The nature of the Rahway Valley's traffic changed considerably, not always for the better. Running an independent

TO OUR SUBSCRIBERS

A substantial rise in printing costs has necessitated raising the subscription price of *Railroading* to seven dollars a year, effective June 1, 1969. A two-year subscription rate of \$13.50 has been established, effective the same date. The single-copy price remains two dollars.

railroad in suburbia became harder and harder to do. George Clark, who owned only one share of stock in the company himself, labored passionately to keep it in the black.

There were open fields along the tracks when George and his father, Roger A. Clark, came to the Rahway Valley from Oregon in 1920. The thread of circumstance from which the Clarks' story depends is that George's father, who began railroading as a traveling auditor on the Buffalo, Rochester & Pittsburgh, was a native of Rochester, N. Y. So was Robert H. England, who at one time or another managed such short lines as the Dansville & Mount Morris in New York, the Tavares & Gulf in Florida, and the St. Louis, El Reno & Western in Oklahoma. Around 1909 England got R. A. Clark to go west as auditor of the Central Railroad of Oregon (now Union Railroad of Oregon). Later, R. A. became station agent at Boring, Ore., for the Portland Railway, Light & Power interurban. England, who had gone back east to become general manager of the Rahway Valley, sent for R. A. to help him straighten out the books. While his father was away, George Clark, then 18 years old, held down the agent's position at Boring. There were times when he found the job—well, boring. Responsibility didn't weigh heavily on him then, and he admitted years later that occasionally he closed the office and went fishing when he was supposed to be out

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LAST OF THE LAST 10

FURTHER ADVENTURES
OF CLINCHFIELD NO. 1 . . . 20

ON THE COVER: For Mobile & Gulf Railroad Mogul No. 97, the day begins as once it did for thousands of engines: with blowing out the cylinders. Steam-powered common carriers are rare enough; only on the 11-mile Mobile & Gulf has



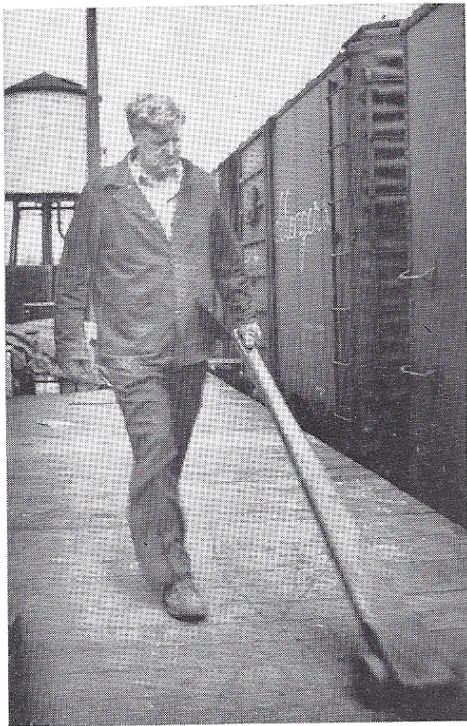
nothing changed. There is no tourist train, no gaudy paint—just old 97, which was built for Cuba, ended up in the hands of the U. S. Army, and now hauls poles in Alabama. In March the owner of the M&G died, leaving his wealth to worthy causes. Thus it is that the last

locomotive on the last unalloyed steam railroad in America is now working for charity. *Photograph by William S. Young*

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EDWARD H. WEBER

collecting checks from shippers. George worked at the interurban's station in nearby Gresham for a while after his father returned; then R. A. decided to move the family to New Jersey and take a permanent position with the Rahway Valley as auditor. George was hired too, as station agent at Springfield, N. J. Soon afterward, England left the company, and R. A. was made president and general manager.

From its inception in 1897 the Rahway Valley had been a deficit operation. It had been started by the developers of the industrial and residential community of New Orange (now Kenilworth) as the 3-mile New York & New Orange Railroad, which linked New Orange with the Jersey Central and Lehigh Valley at Aldene and Roselle Park. After two years of operation there had been a foreclosure sale in 1901 to another company, the New Orange Four Junction Railroad. Louis Keller, publisher of the *Social Register* and founder of the nearby Baltusrol Golf Club, made a deal in 1904 with the Elmira, N. Y., interests that had backed the line since the beginning. The Rahway Valley Railroad was formed, with Keller in control, to acquire the old company and extend the track about 5 miles from New Orange to Summit, passing near the golf club and through lands Keller owned on Baltusrol Mountain. More losses followed the opening of the extension in 1906. Control of the line reverted to the Elmira interests, but Keller was able to set up an operating organization, the Rahway

Valley Company, to lease the property in 1909. (A month before George Clark died, the Rahway Valley Company passed its fiftieth year as lessee. It also leases the Rahway Valley Line, an industrial branch that Louis Keller built from Union to Newark Heights. Keller's estate controls all three companies.)

When R. A. Clark took over in 1920, with his son as vice-president, general freight agent, and auditor, the RV had about 20 customers—a few small manufacturers and a string of coal and lumber yards. The three largest plants on the line had closed after World War I. Some 1400 acres of unoccupied industrial land along its tracks were going begging. The movie producers who used the line to make films with such early stars as Guy Coombs and Anita Stewart had come and gone, and the passenger service, now operated with railbuses, was on its last legs. The RV owned only one good locomotive. The repair shed at Kenilworth, a long wooden structure, was so rickety that one morning after a high wind the employees came to work to find it leaning on the engines. Just before the stock-market crash, R. A. managed to put the line into the black for a short time and buy three locomotives, one of which proved too large to use. His great coup was establishing a connection with the Lackawanna at Summit in 1931, as the Rahway Valley had been trying to do for a quarter-century. (The matter had once gone to the Supreme Court.) But when R. A. died in 1932, the RV's fortunes were again at low ebb.

George Clark, who succeeded his father at the age of 31, was able to operate at a profit in 1936—and every year thereafter. By 1940 there were about 30 carload shippers. New industries were more than compensating for the gradual loss of the anthracite traffic that had kept the line going during the Depression. Clark built a new machine shop and bought another engine, 2-8-0 No. 15. The property began to take on an aura of success, and the Sunday supplements began to discover the Rahway Valley. They soon learned that its president was at least as colorful as the railroad itself, whether he was getting up a letterhead (the Rahway Valley's included a whimsical drawing of a child's dogcart bouncing along the rails, with the caption "Just a short line"), signing his name (in letters more than an inch high), ordering advertising (his may have been the only railroad to give away Varga Girl calendars), or advertising for help:

BRAKEMAN—Steady employment in Freight Service for reliable married man not over 42. Applicants must prove they are alive by being able to breathe, must have sufficient ambition and intelligence to move arms and legs slowly, and above

all must be quick on the draw for grabbing pay checks before the ink is dry.

The train crew worked long hours for short-line pay; anyone who complained was likely to get a short answer, and the Rahway Valley went through brakemen like paper towels. Many of Clark's employees were afraid of him, but some wouldn't have wanted to work anywhere else.

Seldom is a man's correspondence as much like himself as his was. The teenager who wrote for (and got) a ride on the train has kept Clark's reply for 22 years:

Suppose you be a real good boy and rake up the yard and do a dozen or so little odd jobs around the house for "Mother" and then when you have "Dad" in a very good mood don't you think you could induce him to write a letter to me relieving the Rahway Valley Company, Lessee and/or Rahway Valley Railroad Company and/or Rahway Valley Line from all liability. If you can accomplish this I shall see to it that you have a ride in our caboose from Kenilworth to Summit, on some Saturday. We require your parents signature because you are a minor.

Go to work on this Eddie and in this connection I wish you all the luck in the world.

Sincerely yours,
Geo. A. Clark
President & General Manager

P. S.: Tell "Dad" that no risk of accident really exists just as long as you behave yourself and if you don't behave—well we still believe in the old fashioned backside fanning.

The Clarks lived for a long time in a big house near the tracks in Union. In 1943, when wartime gasoline rationing was at its tightest, George bought a brand-new Buda track velocipede with the idea of riding it to work. He made a trip or two between the Unionbury station and Kenilworth, about 2 miles, but decided that pumping up the grade over Tinkettle Hill was too arduous even for him. . . . Passengers were something to be avoided, although he did let a group of boy scouts ride the caboose once. Col. Walter V. Shipley, the Jersey Central's passenger traffic manager, used to tell how George fended off a request to handle a special train by saying that he planned to go fishing on the date in question. . . . In 1946, a banner year, the Rahway Valley used two engines for a while, and Anton Glutting, the agent at Kenilworth, had to write train orders. A sign, "Trainmaster. Private," soon appeared on the station door. While Glutting was loading a box car of L.C.I., the president and general manager was seen to steal out of the station and chalk on the other side of the car: "Red-Ball. Rush this car to the CNJ. Trainmaster Glutting." . . . The progenitor of all the dogs that hung around the Rahway Valley must have been the dirty black-and-white stray that showed up at Kenilworth in the early 1940's. Lady belonged to nobody, begged lunch from

"Railroad men today are not what they used to be—not by a hell of a lot."

The speaker flung his six-foot-three, 235-pound frame into a groaning swivel chair and grinned sourly. This was 58-year-old George A. Clark, president of the Rahway Valley Railroad, all 7.1 miles of it.

This was the man who, needing a brakeman for the freight switching line, advertised in a local paper last week that "no bugle boys, blowhards, dreamers, goldbrickers, hot-shots or wobblemouths" need apply. There were a number of applicants, but the one selected worked exactly two days and was never seen again.

"These boys today don't know what work is," boomed Mr. Clark in his office in the turn-of-the-century wooden building which is Rahway Valley's Kenilworth station and headquarters of the railroad. "On this line, we start out in the morning and work until there is no more to do. If that means night work, we work at night."

Besides a large desk and a couple of easy chairs, the president's office contained a divan (occupied by two nondescript dogs), a refrigerator with open cartons of dog food on top, and a two-ring electric range with jars of instant coffee on a shelf underneath. The walls were covered by a collection of vintage calendars—all bearing pictures of locomotives.

—Ralph Chapman in the New York
Herald Tribune, Mar. 22, 1959

the train crew, hunted rabbits, presented the railroad with two litters of pups, and had a habit of running out onto the greens of a nearby golf course and stealing balls. The police finally traced her to the Rahway Valley, and took her away at the end of a rope. The next day she was back.

In the Fifties, amid postwar prosperity, the RV began to feel the pinch of rising costs. Clark cut the number of employees by one-fourth and began typing his own correspondence. As industries came and went and truck competition loomed ever larger, his cares seemed to grow. We came by one New Year's Day and found him working in the office. His old master mechanic, a skilled machinist, had retired in 1948. Clark loved steam, but finally he had to give in to the trend. When the first diesel, a GE 70-tonner, arrived in January, 1951, he personally opened the door of the new diesel shop and waved it in. The next day, when the diesel made its first run, he was like a kid with a new toy. His presence was also required that day at a common occurrence on the Rahway Valley: a crossing accident. No. 15, the last active steamer, had collided with a tree surgeon's truck. The next day No. 15 got on the ground at a busy crossing while Clark was throwing a party to show the diesel to officials of the neighboring Morristown & Erie Railroad. He often took charge at derailments, and would sometimes suddenly throw another block of wood under the wheels as a pull was being made.

In November, 1953, the diesel came down with cattarrh of the turbocharger. No. 15 had to be steamed up for the first time in months. Clark spent hours out in the shop, worrying the repair job along. On Thanksgiving Day he fired No. 15 himself as an extra crew caught up with the switching. Two days later, on November 28th, steam ran for the last time. In February a second diesel arrived.

George Clark had his first heart attack in 1954. He gave up cigars and tried to work a little less. A third generation was now represented on the Rahway Valley: his son, Robert G. Clark, had become general freight agent and car accountant. George considered putting No. 15 on display at Kenilworth, but land was valuable, and the price of scrap was up. Happily, the late F. Nelson Blount became interested in the 15, and bought her in 1959 for display at the Treasure Island amusement park in Wakefield, Mass. In 1963, No. 15 became the mainstay of excursion service for Steamtown, U.S.A., and ran there until a year ago, when she broke a piston.

The last entry in a diary we kept on the Rahway Valley for nearly two decades was made ten years ago, when a strike by the road's three track workers, who were then making \$1.43 an hour, received heavy coverage from the press and television. "We can hold out for a long, long time," Clark was quoted as saying. "I'm not as young as I used to be, but I learned railroading from my daddy when I was in knee-britches." Did he have any advice for such industry figures as Alfred E. Perlman of the New York Central? "I do," he told a camera. "I think we'd all be better off if there was less talk and more work."

George Clark was a deep sharer in two old American passions: the railroad, and the West where he grew up. He had been back a few times on visits, and talked for years of giving up railroading and returning to the high country. As his health failed, visiting the Rockies was denied him. Lately he had been living in his office, keeping an eye on the property even on weekends. He was finally going to retire. But on the first Monday in April he was still on the job, ready to begin another week's work. He has gone west now, having done what he could to perpetuate a small institution, having done what he could to keep life from being dull.

Short Lines

The word this month is Merger—a process that continues to reduce the number of short lines. The I.C.C. has approved merger of Piedmont & Northern

Railway into Seaboard Coast Line and turned down Southern's competing bid for P&N's South Carolina Division. In 1968 the 153-mile P&N netted more than 1.3 million dollars. . . . In Florida, SCL plans to absorb a short-line subsidiary, Tavares & Gulf Railroad, and abandon 20 miles of its 32-mile route. . . . Chesapeake & Ohio has I.C.C. authority to absorb Fort Street Union Depot Company, a 2-mile Detroit terminal road formerly owned jointly by C&O and the Pennsy. . . . Three Mississippi roads—Columbus & Greenville, Bonhomie & Hattiesburg Southern, and Fernwood, Columbia & Gulf—have accepted terms by which they would become parties to the proposed IC-GM&O merger.

The I.C.C. has approved abandonment of Boston's 97-year-old Union Freight Railroad, which ran in the city streets and was controlled for years by the New Haven. Urban renewal will sweep away all trace of the 2-mile line and its users. . . . Union Transportation Company, locally owned 14-mile agricultural road which has operated Pennsy-controlled trackage in New Jersey for the past 81 years, expects to be put out of business at the end of July by the termination of its lease. Thereafter Penn Central will operate the line. . . . New Jersey's Black River & Western Corp., operator of steam excursions on a portion of PC's 12-mile Flemington Branch, is completing long-pending arrangements to buy the entire line for common-carrier service. . . . Although a highway is still expected to take most of its line, the 2.6-mile Delaware Otsego Railroad at Oneonta, N. Y., has just been certificated as an interstate carrier, is running steam excursions as usual this year, and is looking into piggyback. . . . Weyerhaeuser Company is expected to acquire two short lines as part of its proposed purchase and expansion of the Dierks Forests properties. Dierks owns the De Queen & Eastern Railroad in Arkansas and the connecting Texas, Oklahoma & Eastern Railroad in Oklahoma. Weyerhaeuser now operates one common carrier, the Columbia & Cowlitz Railway in Washington. . . . On March 31st Maryland & Pennsylvania Railroad ran the first train over a 3-mile spur built by Philadelphia Electric Company from Slate Hill, Pa., to the Peach Bottom Atomic Plant. The spur parallels a Ma & Pa line abandoned in 1903. Last year the Ma & Pa netted only \$4,994, but spent more catching up on deferred maintenance and bought a third diesel. . . . Georgia Northern Railway will build an 8.5-mile bypass around Moultrie, Ga., to move through traffic to and from the Sparks-Moultrie line it recently bought from the Georgia & Florida. . . . Since the government-sponsored Cape Breton Development Corporation took over the Dominion Steel & Coal Corporation