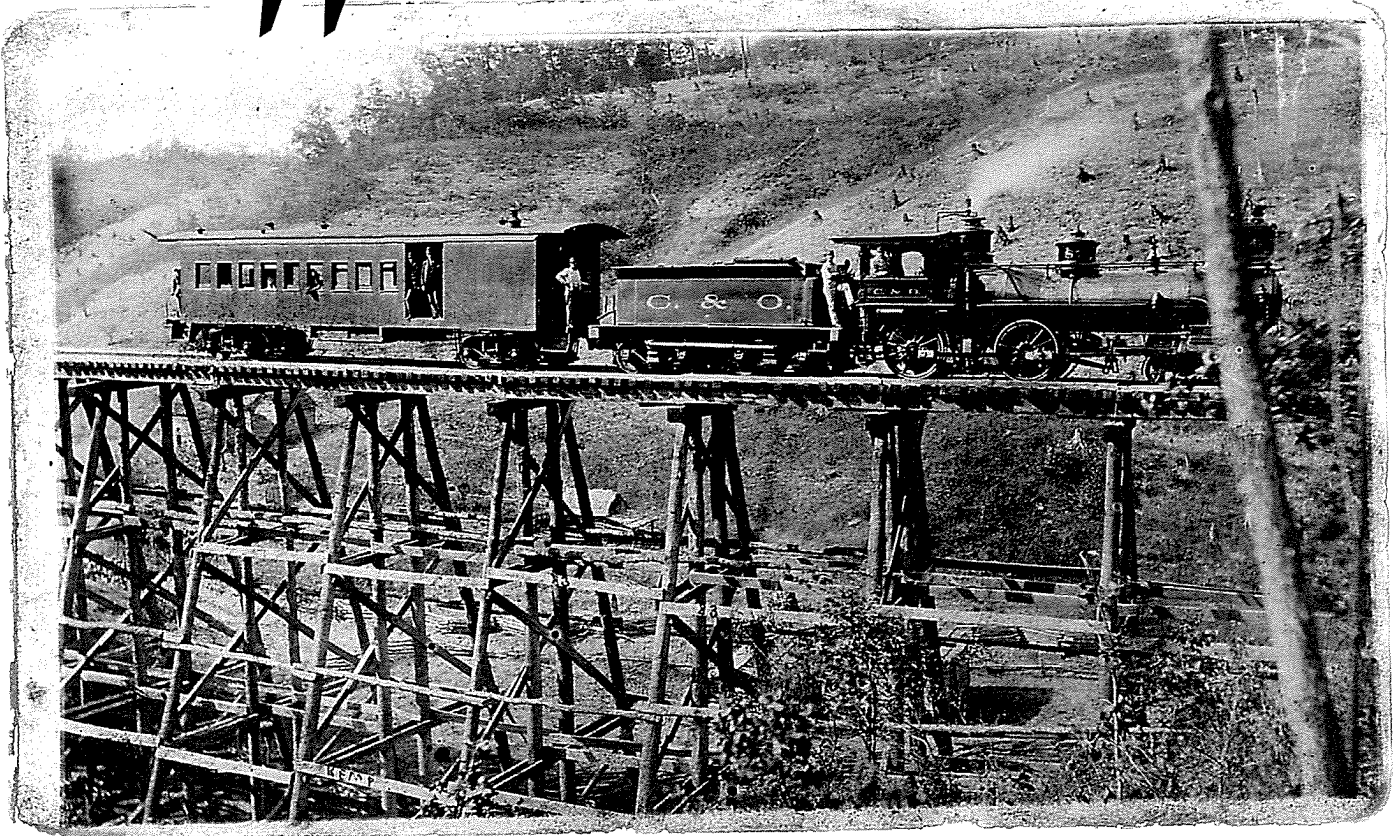


THE WELLSBURG CONNECTION:



C&O and the Brooksville Railroad

by Eugene L. Huddleston

(above) C&O's No. 87 and combine on one of the high trestles north of Deep Cut on the "Kinney Branch." The combine is dated circa 1902 and was built at the Huntington Shops. Economic activity was mainly revenue from the limestone (freestone) quarries near Poplar on Smith Creek in Carter County, Kentucky. (C&OHS Collection)

The reprinting of Elmer G. Sulzer's *Ghost Railroads of Kentucky* in 1998 by the Indiana University Press has brought into prominence again this excellent compilation of abandoned shortlines in a state known for varied and scenic topography. Kentucky grade school students, for example, learn that the famed Bluegrass Region is but one of five distinct regions in the state.

A relatively large number of these abandoned shortlines once connected with the Chesapeake & Ohio. A look at the map in the end sheets of Sulzer's book shows these connections with the C&O's Cincinnati Division and the Lexington Division. Unfortunately, the Lexington Division is now a ghost line itself.

The C&O's Cincinnati Division, however, is still very much

in service, so sorting out the shortlines that once connected with the "C.D.," as the locals call it, still makes sense. Three are covered in Sulzer's book, and they are from east to west: the Eastern Kentucky Railway, known as the "E.K.," which had a junction at Riverton; the Kinniconnick & Freestone, known as the "Kinney," with its junction at Garrison; and the Brooksville Railroad, known as the "Big Windy," with a junction at Wellsburg.

Because the physical layout of the old C&O interests me as much as its locomotives and operations, I have tried to record photographically what is left of the junction of each of these lines with the main line of the Cincinnati Division. The junction that was the most difficult to identify is at Wellsburg, some 40 miles up the Ohio from Cincinnati, where the ten-

This map from the C&O's Chief Engineer's Office shows the Eastern Kentucky Railway from its western terminus at Webbville to Argillite, a few miles before its junction at Riverton with the C&O's Cincinnati Division.
(C&OHS Collection)

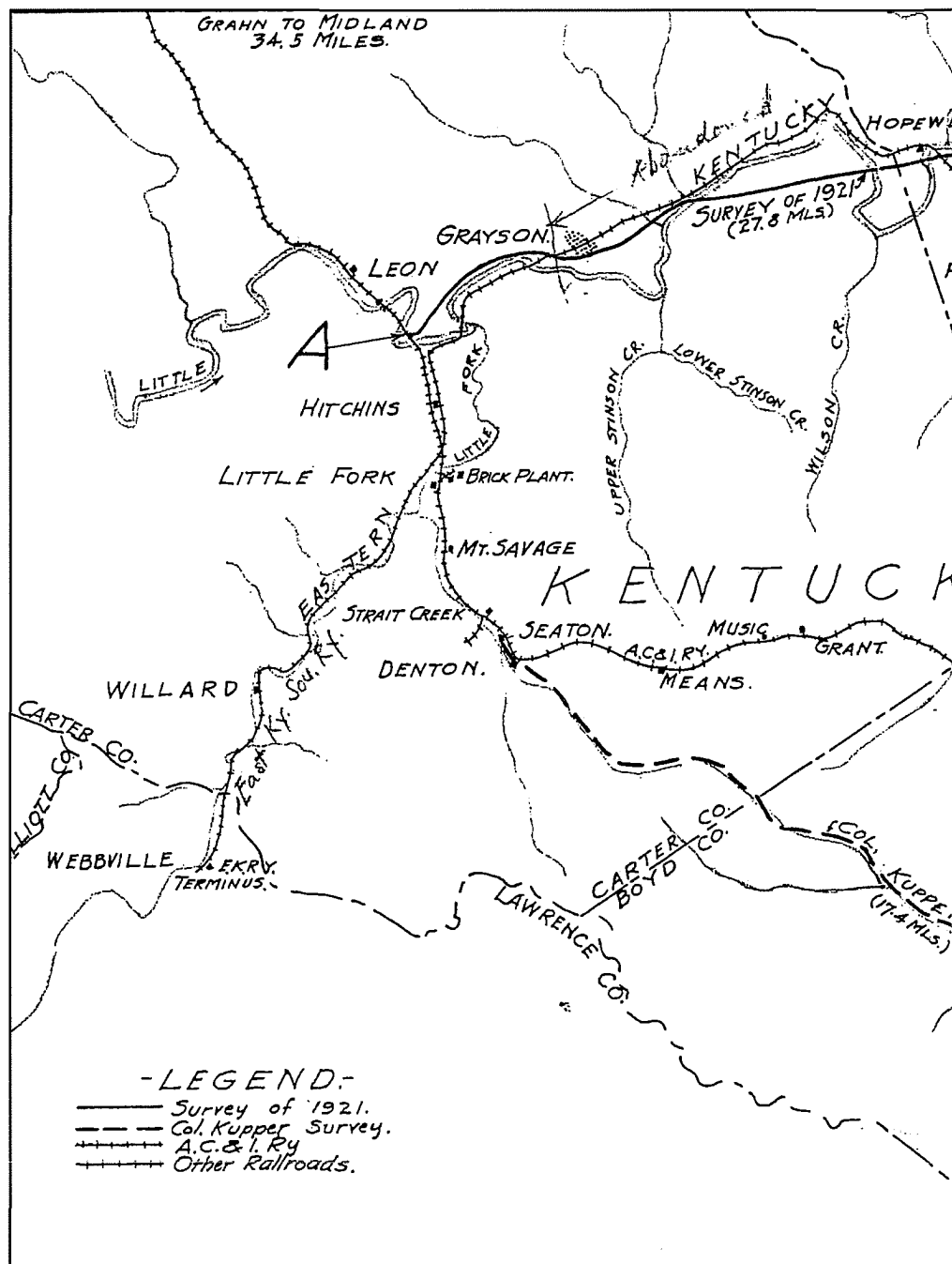
mile long Brooksville Railroad met the C&O.

It is easy enough to visualize the physical setting of the other two connections. The Eastern Kentucky Railway was completed from Riverton, a suburb of Greenup, to Webbville in 1870, before the C&O's Cincinnati Division was built.

According to George Wolfford's history of Carter County, in articles from the *Ashland Daily Independent*, the E.K. intended to bridge the Ohio River at Riverton and link with the Scioto Valley Railroad (later the N&W). It was then to forge through the rugged hills of eastern Kentucky to Pound Gap (the Breaks of Sandy), where it would connect with what later became the Clinchfield Railroad. It never got very far along on its difficult journey through the Cumberlands. One accomplishment in its favor, however, was having a river-to-rail facility on the Ohio River front at Riverton, the road's headquarters.

When Collis P. Huntington built his line through the rugged eastern Kentucky hills, which became the C&O's Lexington Division, he had rail shipped to the site of construction by river packets from Pittsburgh to Riverton, and on the E.K. from Riverton to Hitchins, its crossing with the Lexington line. The E.K. paralleled the Lexington Division for about a mile and crossed the C&O tracks just east of the combined depot at Hitchins. The Great Depression and local highways (bad as they were), however, spelled the end to the E.K..

When C&O's Cincinnati Division tracks were built through Riverton, they had to cross the E.K. line to the Ohio River. I did not know about this "diamond" until I examined an old United States Geological

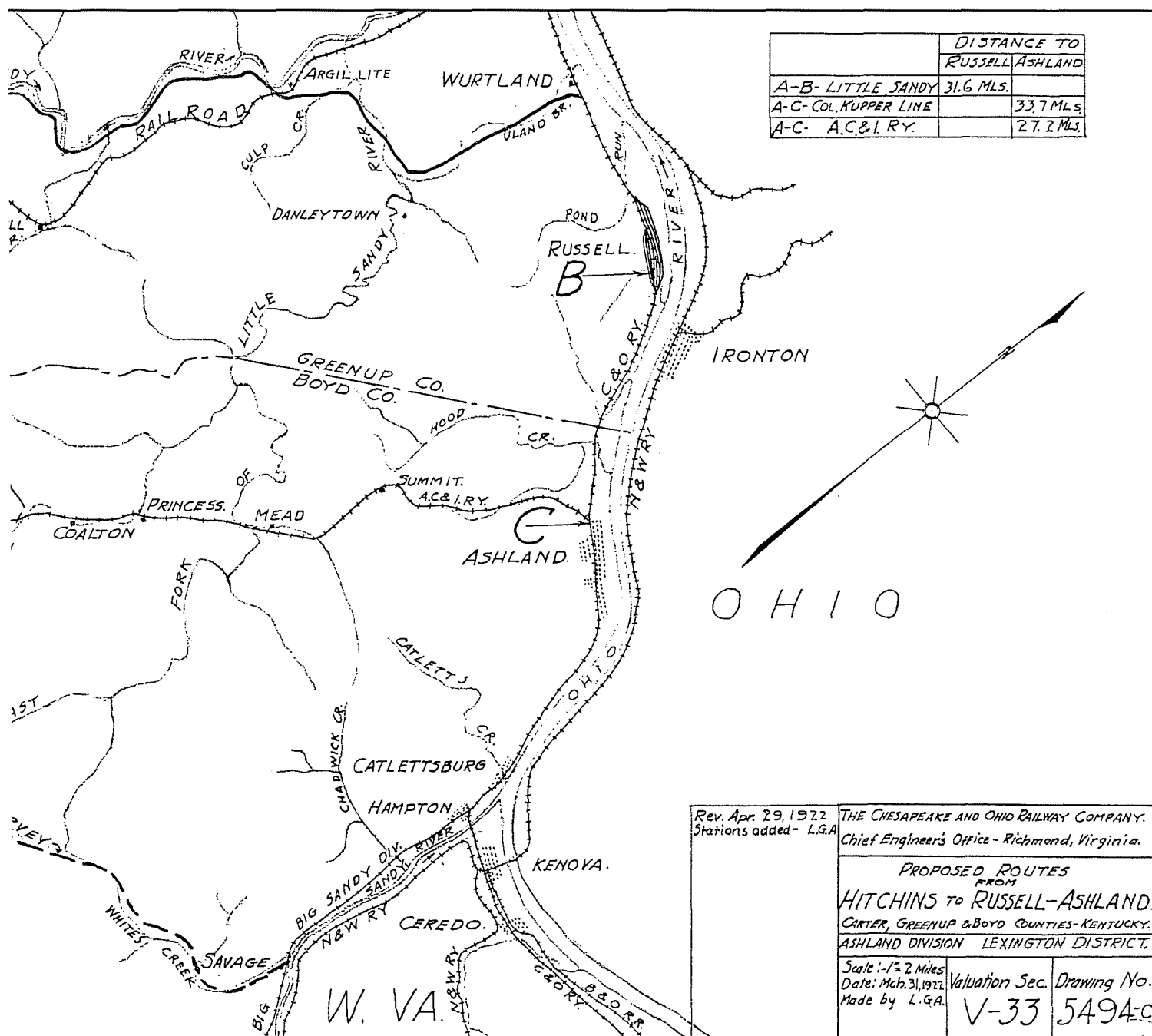


Survey map. I had thought the only connection at Riverton with the C&O was its interchange switch with the C&O; that was before I knew of the E.K. tracks directly to the Ohio River. The position of the interchange connection was easy to visualize, for around 1950 the C&O built a siding to a lumber company about a quarter mile south utilizing the right-of-way of the E.K. and its switch connection.

Any evidence of the diamond has long since disappeared. The only way one could guess that the E.K. crossed the C&O was a large vacant

area on the river (or north) side of the C&O tracks in line with what would have been the E.K. tracks to the river. The point here is that there is no mystery to the E.K. connection with the C&O at Riverton.

The same applies to the Kinniconnick and Freestone, which the C&O took over as a branch line not long after the road was completed in 1894. The junction at Garrison, west of the mouth of Kinniconnick Creek, is still in evidence, even though the road was abandoned in 1941. As late as 1959,



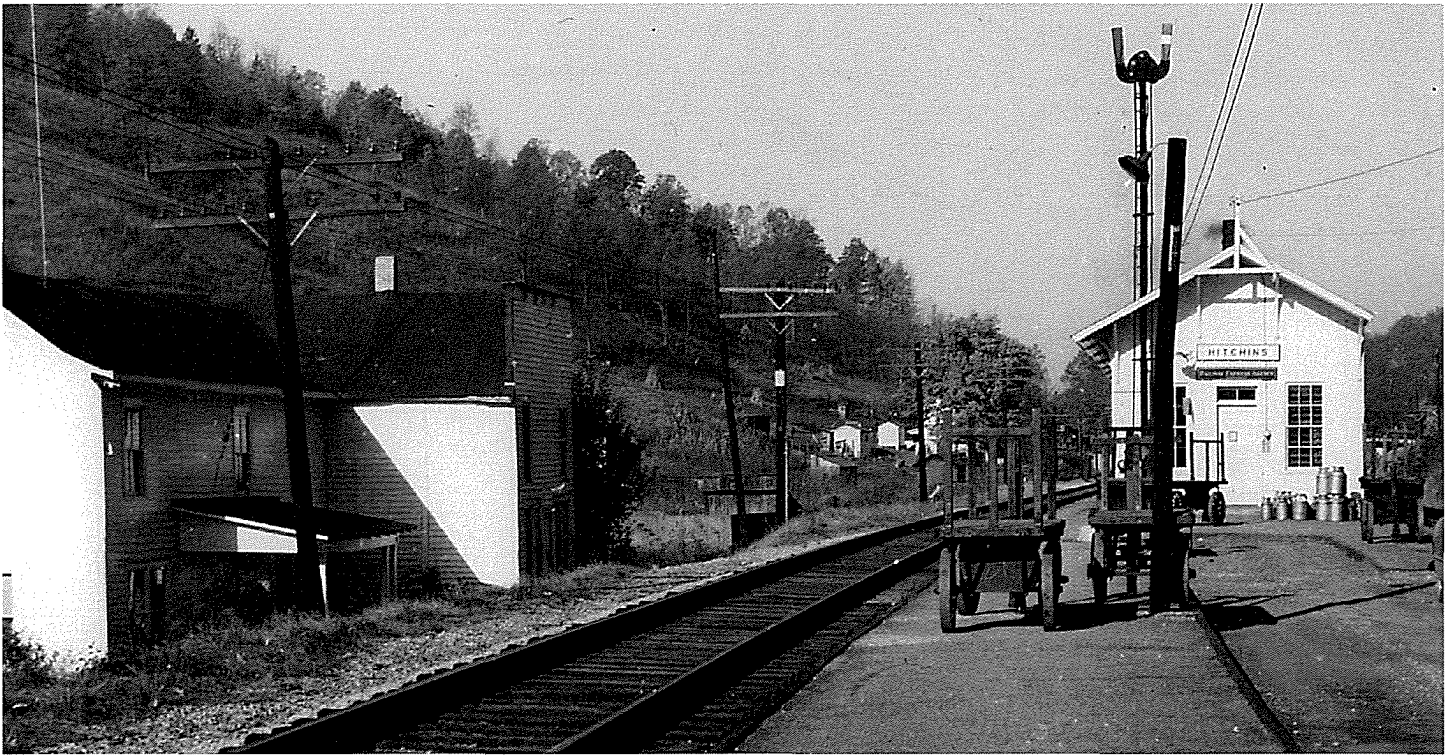
the wye track comprising the junction was in place, having a tail track of 865 feet. What required the wye and the long spur is unknown. Sulzer says the track was for storage. The K&F is one of the most interesting lines covered in Sulzer. His account would be even more interesting if he had interviewed even more longtime residents of Carter City than he did. ("City" was needed to distinguish Carter from Carter County, whose seat was Grayson.) Carter was well isolated except for the railroad. The end of the line was a mile or so

beyond Carter at Gesling. Excursion trains, originating at Cincinnati and Huntington, ran up the branch in the summer, a service started in 1896.

My great Aunt Tennessee (called "Tenny") was married to a Syrian Christian named George Hike, who operated a general store in Carter. When I was a preteen in the early 1940s I visited Carter. The trestle over Smith Creek was still in place and the large wooden dance pavilion, built by the C&O, still stood, though long unused. Above it, near the top of a steep hillside, were

the Oligunuk Caverns. George Wolfford explains that a wooden foot-ramp took the tourists from the unloading platform to the pavilion. The appeal of a trip to Carter would have been to hike up the hill to see the caves and then live it up on the dance floor. Sulzer says that the city folk and the local country folk sometimes got in fights with each other.

It would be interesting to examine Cincinnati newspapers around the first years of the century to see if the railroad ran ads for these excursions as the C&O did, con-

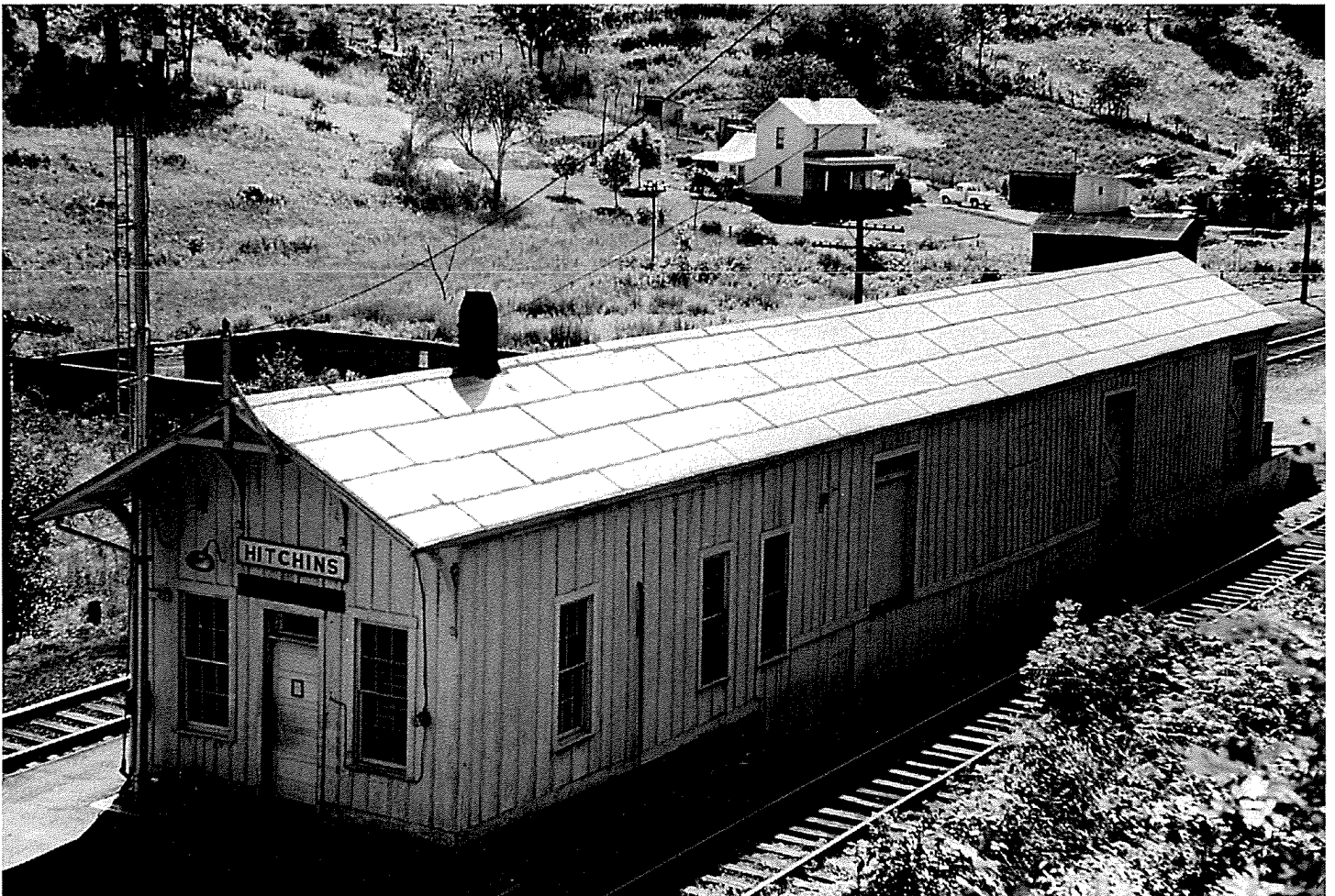


(above) The C&O station at Hitchins, Kentucky, circa 1955.

(C&O Photo; C&OHS Collection)

(below) The track in the foreground of this 1964 view of the Hitchins depot was the E.K. main line, now used as a passing siding. The E.K. crossed the C&O main east of the station about a quarter-mile to the left of this view.

(Photo by Eugene L. Huddleston)



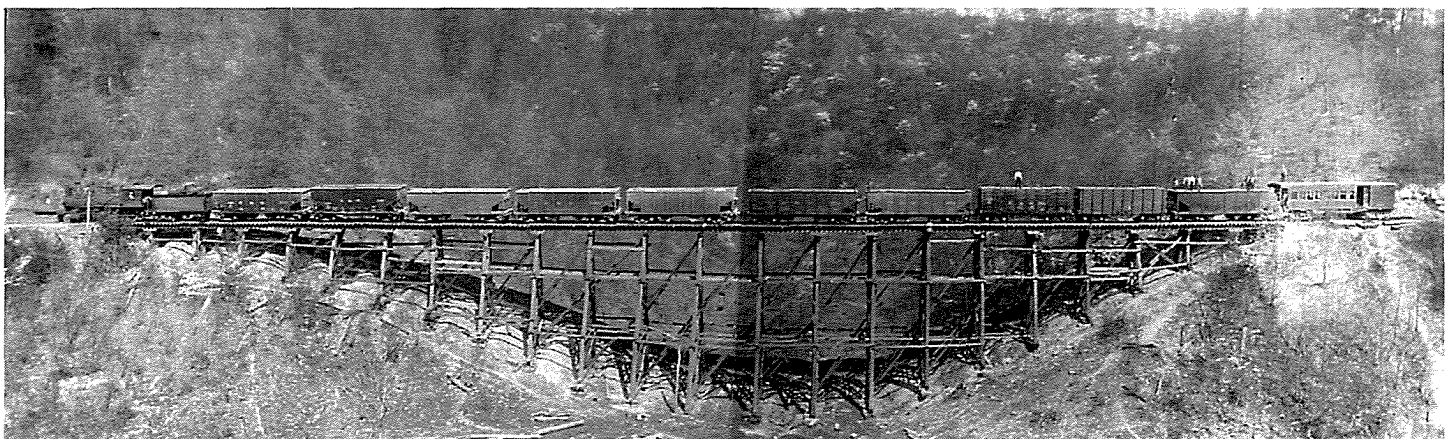
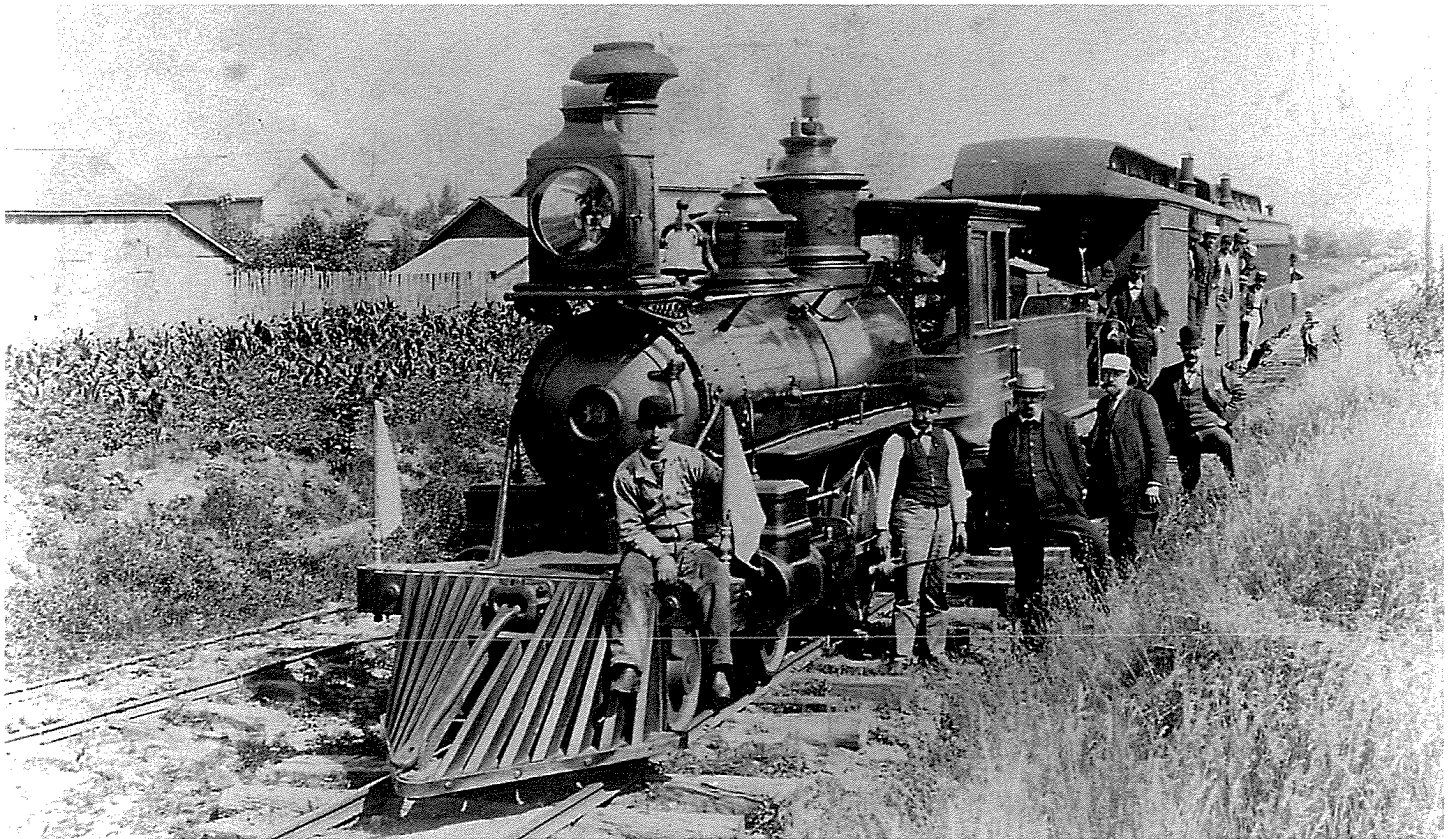


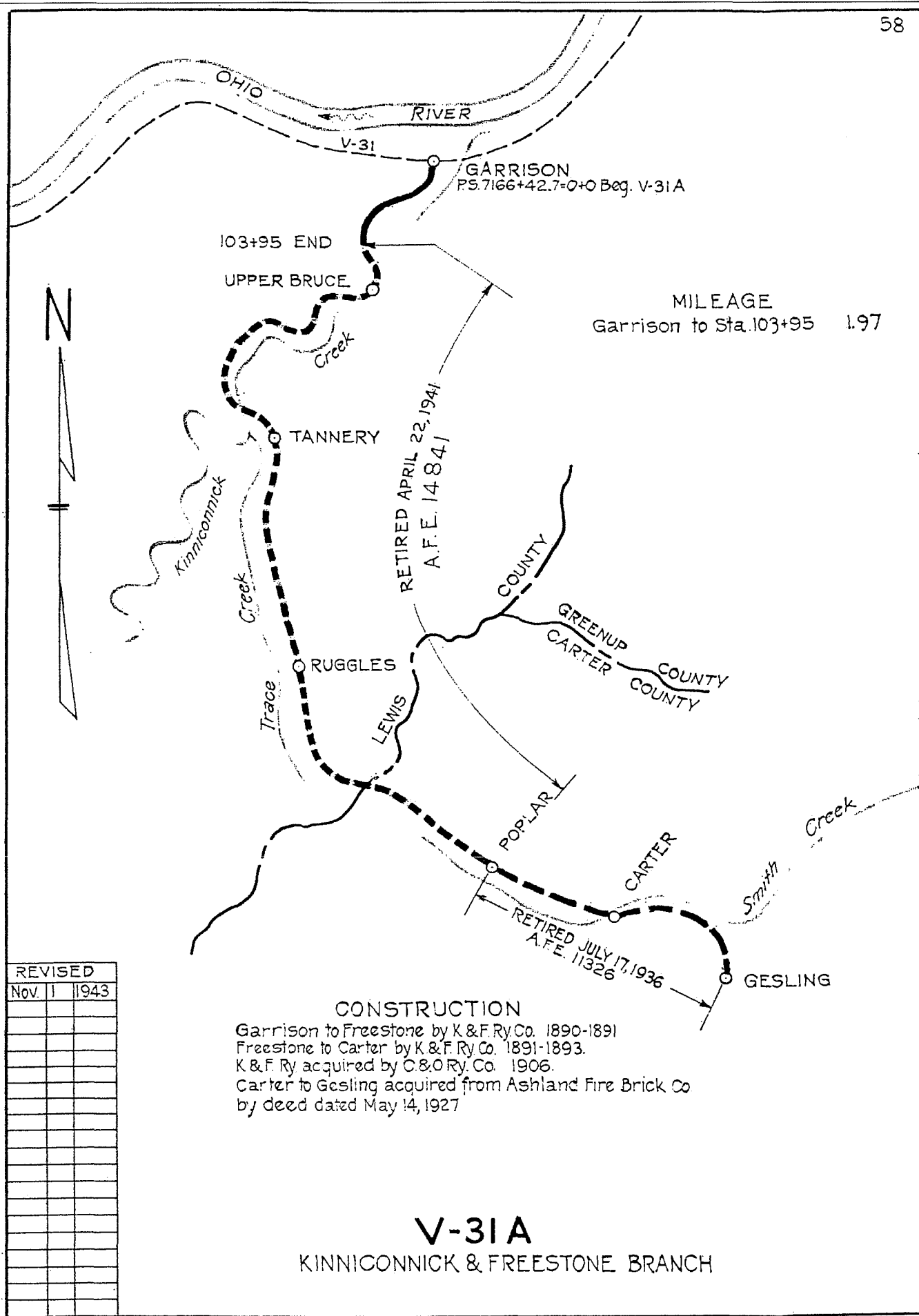
(left) The Ensign Manufacturing Company of Huntington, West Virginia, built this E.K. boxcar in 1880. C.P. Huntington and other associates formed the Ensign Manufacturing Company in 1872. In 1899 it became a part of the American Car and Foundry Company, one of the leading manufacturers of railroad equipment.

(below) Inspection train on K&F about 1891 pulled by C&O 4-4-0 No. 38. The location is the Ohio River Valley flood plain in vicinity of the wye at Garrison.

(bottom) A distant composite view of a ballast train crossing K&F high trestle behind engine No. 264.

(following page) A C&O map from November 1943 showing the Kinniconnick & Freestone Branch from Garrison to Gesling.
(All photos, C&OHS Collection)





Webbville to Greenup

SUNDAY JULY 2, 1893

FOR THE ACCOMMODATION OF ALL WHO WISH TO GO.

SEE THE CHEAP RATES BELOW

AND DO NOT FAIL TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THEM AND SPEND

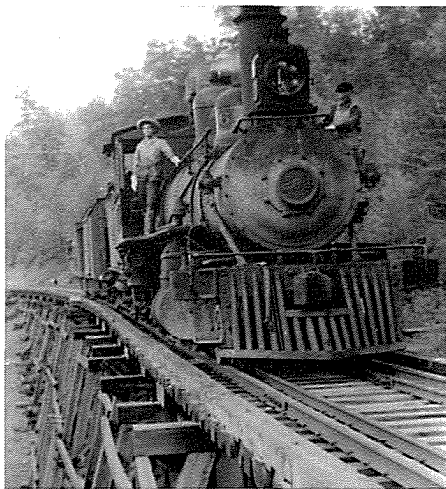
SUNDAY ON THE OHIO RIVER.

Train will run as follows, viz:

LEAVE Webbville	8:00 a. m.	Round Trip	75 cts.
" Bell's Trace	8:05 "	" "	75 "
" Willard	8:20 "	" "	75 "
" Reedville	8:30 "	" "	75 "
" E. K. Junction	8:40 "	" "	75 "
" Vincent's	8:45 "	" "	65 "
" Grayson	9:00 "	" "	50 "
" Pacolus	9:05 "	" "	50 "
" Hopewell	9:15 "	" "	40 "
" Hunnewell	9:30 "	" "	40 "
" Laurel	9:40 "	" "	25 "
" Argillite	9:50 "	" "	25 "
ARRIVE Riverton	10:00 "	" "	" "

RETURNING train will leave Riverton at 2:25 p. m. arrive at Webbville at 4:30 p. m.

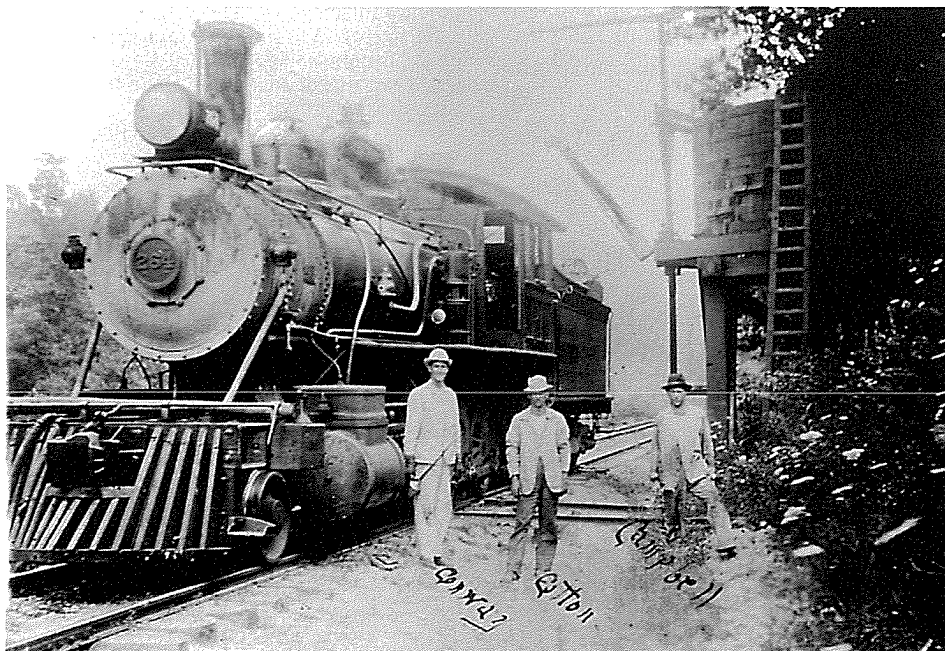
PROCURE TICKETS FROM AGENTS.
R. B. LEEDY, Sup't.



(above) Locomotive No. 286, later renumbered 653, was originally 160 and is a light Consolidation, a C&O Class G-1. It was built in April of 1883, and was scrapped in December 1931. This locomotive has a mixed consist and is between Deep Cut and Trace on the "Kinney" Branch.

(below) Locomotive No. 264, a 2-8-0, was similar to No. 286. Here No. 264 is getting water at the spring fed tank on the east side of Big Hill on the "Kinney" Branch.

(Both photos, C&OHS Collection)



firmed by my own observations, in outlying towns for baseball excursions to Cincinnati after World War II. Undoubtedly, such ads were responsible for an immigrant like George Hike settling in a remote place like Carter.

The wye lasted into the 1970s, to the best of my knowledge. Today, I suspect the tracks at Garrison are all gone. (Wherever

welded rail is laid, one sees a great reduction in turnouts.) But even so, it would still be easy to trace where the junction had been.

The connection of the Brooksville Railroad with the "C.D." at Wellsburg was a different matter. I have always been interested in the ten-mile shortline because my great uncle, John W. Byrne of Brooksville, was General Manager of the road

from about 1910 to 1912. The road was completed in 1896 and abandoned in 1931.

Existing USGS topographical maps did not help in solving the mystery. Just about every time I would drive past Wellsburg on my way to and from Cincinnati, I would try to figure out where the junction had been. The only map I had was the one in the *Ghost Railroads of Kentucky* chapter on the Brooksville; its scale was too small to be of much value. The only other help was a picture in Sulzer's book of an American-type locomotive owned by the Brooksville Railroad and parked in front of the C&O's Wellsburg depot.

The C&O depot was the standard "gingerbread" depot, identical to the remodeled one at Vanceburg, Ky., some 50 miles up the Ohio from Wellsburg. The Vanceburg depot is, in fact, the only wooden depot left on the "C.D.": brick depots remain at Covington, Maysville, and South Portsmouth. But this did not tell me a lot about locating the junction. It did show the edge of a house across the tracks from the depot. The picture had to be taken in 1918 or before, for that is when regular passenger service over the line ended.

I knew the line out of the Valley had to follow the narrow valley of Locust Creek, for there was no other way out, but I could get nowhere. This time, in April 1999, I finally decided to talk to somebody! This was after driving my car to the only crossing of what I took to be Wellsburg's main street with the (now) one-track CSX main line.

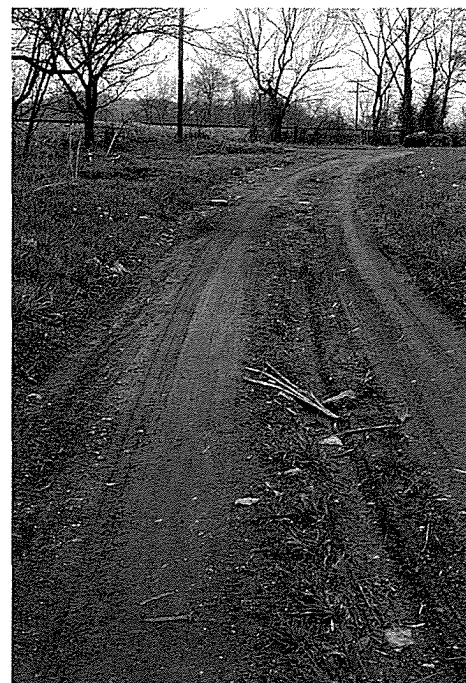
Looking around, I could see nothing promising. Since this was the only crossing within sight of the long tangent, I knew it was the main street of Wellsburg. A street ran parallel to the CSX tracks, about a block away, but since it never curved in the direction of the tracks, I ruled it out and did not follow it. As I was driving slowly back to the main highway discour-

aged, I saw a friendly looking young man and older woman working in a front yard. I asked them about the Brooksville connection, and I hit pay dirt. They went to a neighboring house and found an 82-year-old retired heavy construction equipment operator, named Willard L. Fryman, who much earlier in life had worked for the C&O. Mr. Fryman confirmed what they were saying. I learned that the actual junction of the Brooksville Railroad, which they called the Brooksville and Wellsburg, was almost a full half mile west of the present road crossing, which is where the C&O depot had been. Mr. Fryman pointed out that the Brooksville Railroad had trackage rights from the junction switch to the depot and team track, where they could interchange freight cars. At the actual junction was a converted box car used as an office, the Brooksville representative being in one end and the C&O representative in the other.

As directed by the very helpful residents of Wellsburg, I drove to the break in the fence, where I had

been told to park. It made sense that the Brooksville line came in this direction, because of its route along Locust Creek. I walked down the level of the highway to the flood plain. At that point I was perhaps 1,200 feet from the CSX (the former C&O) main line. Two unpaved clay bed roads lay in front of me. One went directly to a small mobile home park, and the other curved along the edge of a big field toward the tracks. The gentle curve gave this road away as a former railroad right-of-way, even though there was no ready evidence in the clay bed of the road itself to suggest tracks had once been there.

The main reason why I had not considered this road before was that it was about ten feet lower than the level of State Highway 8, and it obviously had to cross the highway to proceed up the valley of Locust Creek. So how did the tracks of the Brooksville get over or under highway? I asked Mr. Fryman and the other gentleman about this problem. The latter thought the railroad must have gone under the highway. Mr.



(above) In 1999, spikes could still be found embedded in the old Brooksville Railroad right-of-way at Wellsburg, Kentucky. The CSX (ex-C&O) main line is visible in the background.

(below) In this April 1999 view of the ex-C&O main line at Wellsburg, the former Brooksville Railroad right-of-way can just be seen at left in the remains of an S-curve where the line left its C&O connection.

(Both by Eugene L. Huddleston)



Fryman said that no state highway or even a through road was there when the tracks were laid, so he thought the road was built up with "fill" to that level, possibly to put the road above the flood stage of the Ohio River. Nevertheless, just how the railroad crossed the highway is still a mystery.

Walking out this road toward the C&O, I looked carefully for evidence that a railroad had once been there. Sure enough, embedded in the clay road surface about two or three hundred feet in the direction of the junction were two rust encrusted rail

spikes, which I dug out as souvenirs. As I got nearer the CSX main line, the road started a reverse curve towards a junction with the "C.D." Any trace of it, however, ended in the brush with a distance of about 50 feet from the CSX track.

Railroad hobbyists get fulfillment in many ways. Some say Elmer Sulzer cared nothing for a particular railroad until its tracks were torn up and removed. When I was a bachelor, I recall driving with a railfan acquaintance into the farmlands of DeKalb and Steuben Counties in

Indiana, on an overcast Sunday morning, looking for the remains of a long abandoned interurban – a truly difficult but often rewarding quest. S.

This diagram of a "Shelter Station near Wellsburg" is dated 1919, and it presents a mystery. Why was this station built? It does not appear to have a stove, and there was already a station in Wellsburg, erected probably in the late 1880s, which had an agent for a number of years. Moreover, why does the drawing say "near" Wellsburg? One possible explanation is that the shelter is for Rock Springs, which is 0.7 miles to the east of Wellsburg. Hence, this lonely shelter station is "near" Wellsburg.

(C&OHS Collection)

