

The Georges Creek Railroad, 1853 - 1863

by Patrick Stakem

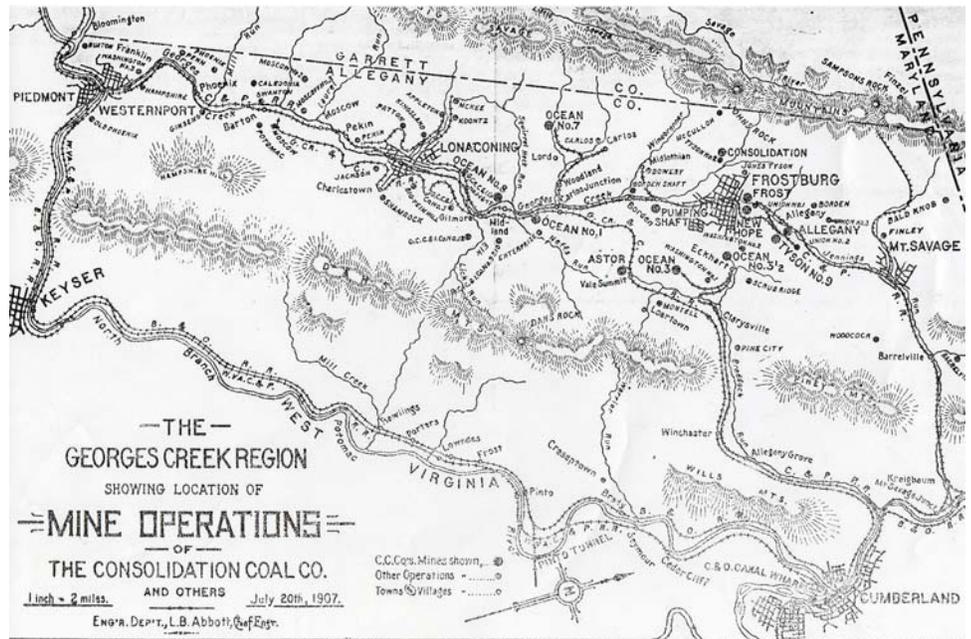
Historian, Western Maryland Chapter, NRHS, Inc.

This is one in a series of short articles on the early mining railroads of Allegany County, Maryland. Iron and coal companies built these roads in the 1840s, in anticipation of connecting with the B&O railroad and the C&O Canal. Some of these mining companies owned and operated their own equipment. All of the lines were absorbed into the Cumberland & Pennsylvania Railroad by 1870. The short line discussed in this article is not to be confused with the Georges Creek & Cumberland Railroad of 1876, which was a rival to the C&P. It is reproduced at VagelKeller.com by kind permission of the author.

The Lonaconing Furnace. The Georges Creek Coal & Iron Company was formed in 1835, and chartered in the State of Maryland on March 29, 1836. Between 1837 and 1839, the company built an iron furnace at Lonaconing. The furnace, fueled by coke, went into blast in 1839. There was plenty of iron ore, limestone, water, and coal locally, but the major problem the company faced was transporting finished products to market. Production reached 75 tons per week, and local iron needs were quickly satisfied. Some products were shipped out by wagon, including such items as dowels for the C&O Canal walls. The adjacent casting house made farming implements, mine car wheels and track, and household utensils. The furnace output was mostly in the form of pig iron, which was sold to be recast, or worked.

One key ingredient of a blast furnace is the blast. The company bought the necessary machinery from the West Point Foundry in New York City. The machinery went by ship from New York to Georgetown, then by canal to Williamsport. Here, the parts were loaded on wagons for the final leg of the journey. The canal charged \$3.50 per ton to transport the twenty tons of machinery parts. Only the boilers made it to Lonaconing before the canal froze in the winter of 1837. Ten additional wagon loads from Williamsport arrived at the site in November.

The blast machinery featured a 60-horsepower steam engine fed by five boilers. The steam cylinders were 18" in diameter, and 8 feet long. The system operated at 50 psi. The steam cylinder drove a blast cylinder 5 feet in diameter, and 8 feet long. This forced about 3500 cubic feet per minute of air at 2.5 psi through the system.



Map of the Georges Creek Coal Field showing how the area had developed by the early 20th Century.

A very large iron regulator smoothed the air flow from the reciprocating cylinder. The air flowed through a series of pipes in the boiler furnaces and was heated to 700 degrees F. The heated air then entered the blast furnace through two big water-cooled nozzles called tuyeres. When the water supply failed, the furnace had to be operated with a less efficient cold blast. The first run of good iron came from the furnace on May 17, 1839. By May 23, the furnace was producing six tons per day. Seven tons of coal were required to produce one ton of the cast metal.

A Railroad Comes Too Late. With production going well, iron piled up in Lonaconing. In 1842, sales of pig iron to foundries in Cumberland were begun, with delivery by wagon. An adjacent sawmill and lumberyard, also owned by the company, recorded sales to the Mt. Savage Iron Works, then involved in building their own furnaces. In the fall of 1842, pig iron was offered to the B&O railroad at a price of \$29. per ton. Delivery was still a problem. After experimenting with a horse powered tram road, the company realized that a rail line, built down the Georges Creek Valley for 9.2 miles toward the Potomac River at Westernport, would be the answer to the transportation issue. The rail line was finished from Lonaconing to Piedmont in 1853, where it connected with the recently completed B&O Railroad. It was, unfortunately, too late to provide the needed market access for the Lonaconing Iron Furnace. The furnace in Lonaconing was abandoned in 1855, and the canal was never extended past Cumberland. Coal, not iron, became

the most important commodity shipped out of the region.

A major figure in the Lonaconing Iron Furnace was Christian Edward Detmold, (1810-1887). A civil engineer born in Hanover, Germany, Detmold had entered the U.S. at age 16, en route to Brazil to join the Army, but stayed here instead. He did surveys for a railroad in Charleston, S.C., won a \$500. prize for a horse treadmill car from the Charleston & Hamburg Railroad & Canal Co., and worked for the U.S. War Department on the construction of Fort Sumpter. From 1845 to 1852 Detmold was involved in iron production at Lonaconing. He was responsible for the construction of the tram road in 1847 from Lonaconing to Clarysville. This line connected with the Eckhart Branch Railroad, constructed by the Maryland Mining Company. Detmold leased the furnace, overhauled the boilers, and rebuilt the engine house. The furnace went back into blast in May 1846, and Detmold had a flourishing business by 1847. He was producing 2500 tons of pig iron annually. The company, perhaps jealous of his success, declined to renew his lease. He moved on to direct construction of the Exhibit of Industry, at the Crystal Palace in New York which opened in July of 1853. C. E. Detmold is remembered by having both a town, and a C&P engine named after him.

After taking back the furnace facility from Detmold, Georges Creek C&I operated it sporadically. The furnace produced 1,860 tons of pig iron in its last active year, 1855. It was then shut down, and abandoned. Harvey (ref. 6) states that the furnace facility was too technologically advanced for its time. However, it provided an impetus for the mining industry and for the construction of the railroad, and served as an model for a similar iron working facility built at Mount Savage. The furnace

complex was visited by the Superintendent of Construction for the B&O, a Mr. Casper Wever, Esq., in June of 1839. Shortly afterwards, the shareholders of the C&O Canal visited. With the furnace up and operating, the facility expansion plans included a forge and rolling mill. However, these were never built. The company began to concentrate on the railroad to meet with the canal or the railroad at Westernport. In 1850, surveys were complete.

The B&O reached Piedmont, across the Potomac River from Westernport, in July of 1851. In September of that year, the railroad construction began up the Georges Creek. The railroad was opened on May 9, 1853. In June, a total of 1,061 tons of coal were shipped. In all of 1855, 225,000 tons of coal were shipped, sometimes in 102 car trains. Iron, ore or cast, did not figure into the shipments. In 1856, the line was extended from Lonaconing northward to connect with the C&P from Frostburg. The Georges Creek Coal & Iron Company,s 9.2 mile railroad was acquired by the C&P on October 23, 1863. The shops and engine house at Lonaconing were used until 1867.

Interestingly, this section of line still sees use. In 1994 for on-demand coal service. In 1991, the Georges Creek subdivision of CSX hauled 195,197 tons of coal over this line, as compared with 225,000 tons in 1855.

GCRR Motive Power. The Baldwin Locomotive Works and Smith & Perkins sold engines and rolling stock to the Georges Creek Company. Ross Winans of Baltimore sold wheels and axles to the GCC&I for mine cars. It is not known whether passenger service was provided on the Georges Creek Railroad, although a 2-6-0 engine is most suited for passenger service. A list of motive power for the Georges Creek Railroad has been compiled, but it is not known if this is a complete list.

GEORGES CREEK RAILROAD LOCOMOTIVE ROSTER

NAME	TYPE	BUILDER	DATE	NOTES	DISPOSITION
<i>A. H. Stump</i>	2-6-0	S&P	1852	NA	C&P #5, scrp. 1875
<i>Georges Creek</i>	0-8-0	Baldwin	1853	Builder No. 521	C&P #6, scrp. 1876
Lonaconing	0-6-0	Baldwin	1853	Builder No. 558	C&P #8, scrp. 1874

All of the listed engines were transferred to Cumberland & Pennsylvania Railroad ownership, as part of the buyout. No pictures of the 2-6-0 or 0-6-0 engines are known to exist. A photo of the engine Georges Creek is in the J.G. Farrell Collection. Before 1851, general railroad practice was to name engines rather than number them. Locomotives were generally named after geographical references, or persons of significance. The significance of Mr. A. H. Stump has not yet been determined.

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