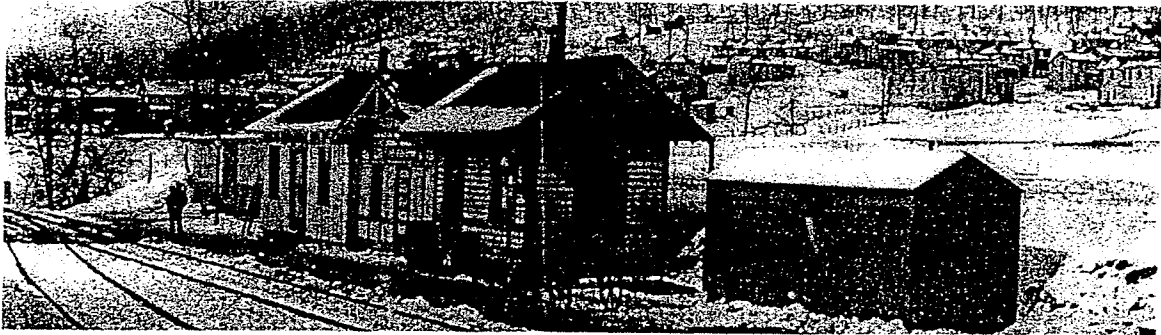


Lest We Forget



Early Weirton settlers got first glimpse of new town at this Weirton P.C.C. & St. L. Railway station. Photo was taken in 1911.

**Dedicated to those in attendance at the “New Beginning” of the
FORT VANCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY, October 10,2009.**

Stories & Pictures of the Panhandle Railroad

Research & Story by June Campbell Grossman

The Thomas Edgington Family

One of the very first families to settle in the Cove was the Thomas Edgingtons. It was recorded by early historians that they arrived by raft from the north, coming down the Ohio River about as far as today's Fort Steuben Bridge. Thomas secured land surrounding the passageway known in the early days as Ferry Road.

The exact date of the arrival of the Edgingtons is not known, but Indian atrocities at the time were at their peak. Thomas and his wife had arrived with three sons and two daughters: Thomas, Jr., George, Jessie, Harriet, and Sarah. After settling in, one day Thomas went to Brown's Fort to borrow a log chain. On his way back home, he was accosted by angry Indians and taken captive. He would probably have escaped but got trapped in the mud at the mouth of Harmon Creek. He spent two years as the prisoner of these red men and would have died but for the kindness and care of Scotash who befriended Thomas and kept him from starvation by sharing his own meager rations of food. After a couple of years, Scotash designed a plot to return Edgington to his home. His family did not know him when he arrived, nearly starved to death and aged from his horrendous ordeal. But all was not joy when he climbed the bank of the Ohio and made his way toward his old home. He was greeted with the sad news that during his absence, his son, George, had been murdered by the Indians and was buried on the land Thomas had suffered so much to possess.

Years went by, and Jessie, the youngest son, grew to manhood. He never married, but he built a beautiful house on the home place for his siblings and their families. The picture on the following page is a front view of this highly acclaimed homestead.

Jessie Edgington became one of the best loved and most influential citizens of the area. He is probably remembered most for his work in trying to get built the seven miles of railroad line from Colliers to the Ohio River so that it would be possible to travel by rail from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to Newark, Ohio. The hitch in this otherwise well-planned endeavor was brought about by the fact that the act which authorized the railroad construction stated that it was to stop at the Virginia state line. Thus the little village of Colliers was the getting-off point for travelers from Pittsburgh bent for Ohio.

Jessie and his buddy, Nathaniel Wells, both wealthy men, had become railroad bugs, and were determined to get the trains at least as far west as Hollidays Cove, and then worry about how they would cross the Ohio River.

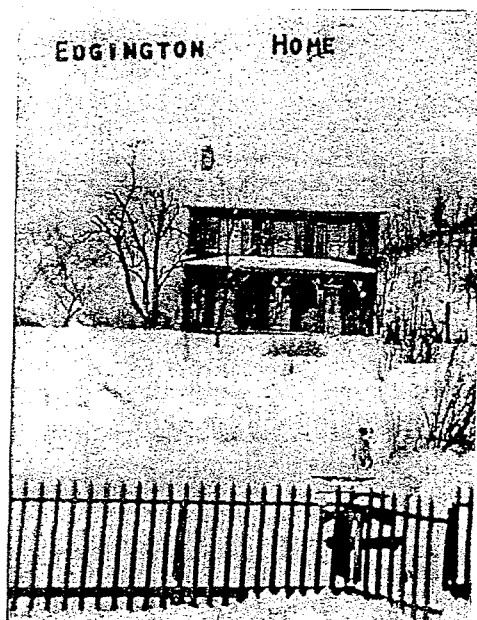
A small book could be written stating the adventures encountered by these two men as they set about to perform this feat. But in simple language, it amounts to the fact that they bought up 7 miles of land, 100 feet wide, and jumped in with both feet to get that track laid.

For some unknown reason, the Virginia legislature was just as adamant that the track would NOT be laid. At one point in time, they tried to pass legislation making it a misdemeanor, punishable by time in the penitentiary,

for any person building a railroad within the limits of the state who did not have their written consent. But Wells and Edgington were not licked yet. They went to Richmond, and being personable men with pleasing ways, they convinced the legislature not to pass the bill. They built their tracks and operated their train for about six months until it proved to be not as feasible as they had hoped. People could now get from Pittsburgh to the Ohio River, but there was still no sensible way to get across the water, and thus on the train that would take them to Newark. And even the little 7 mile run they had worked so hard to produce, was not very satisfactory. Later developments of course took the train easily from Pittsburgh to the Ohio, and in 1864, near the close of the Civil War, the railroad bridge was finally built across the river. And on the now unused railroad bed of Edgington and Wells were laid the final tracks which, in December of 1867, became the famous Panhandle Railroad.

Jessie Edgington was a very frail old man by this time. At the dedication service, the local world honored him by having him drive a gold spike into a railroad tie to commemorate his years of work in trying to bring the railroad to town. But another man had to hold Jessie up while he pounded in the glistening spike to the wild cheers of the entire population of Hollidays Cove. The first passenger train went from Steubenville to Pittsburgh on the day Lincoln was shot. Jessie died at the age of 84. It is said that his first and only ride on those tracks was when they took his body from his beloved Hollidays Cove to be buried with his family at Union Cemetery, high on the beautiful hill above Steubenville.

The Edgington Home



FROM COLLECTION OF MARY
CAMPBELL BOWMAN, HISTORIAN

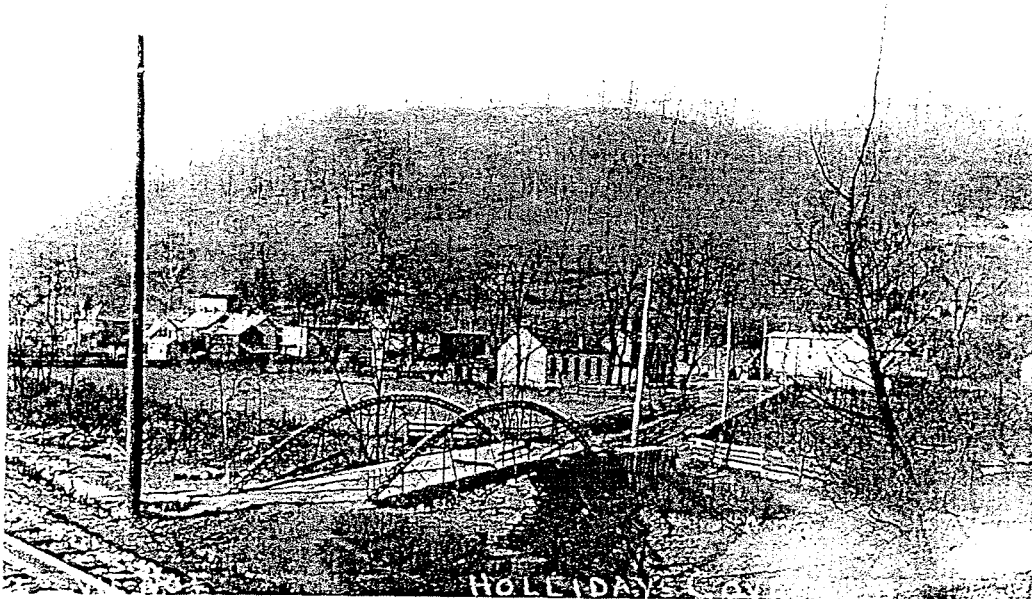
The Harmon Creek Wagon Bridge

This picture is of the Wagon Bridge over Harmon Creek that stood near the old Hindman Mill, Brooke County, WV. Another man had built the mill but became weary of milling. Meanwhile, John Hindman had become weary of farming. The story handed down by word of mouth is that the men made an even trade - a farm for a mill.

A picturesque landmark in its own right, this little bridge was a favorite of people of all ages in the days before the Flood of 1912 when it was completely destroyed. It was never rebuilt. Some old timers say that it stood where the "Rat Hole" was later constructed.

The Panhandle Rail Road tracks can be seen on the left in the picture. The white building with the five windows on the side is the first Christian Church of the Hollidays Cove area. It was also destroyed in the flood and never rebuilt. A new and very different looking structure was, however, built on Main Street the following year much farther uptown. This church in the picture stood approximately where the Weirton Lumber Company now stands. The line of houses in this picture stood along Cove Road.

The Wagon Bridge over Harmon Creek



The Three Arch Bridge over Harmon Creek

The structure known as the Three Arch Bridge near the Police Lodge area of Harmon Creek Road is an overpass, permitting traffic to get across Harmon Creek from Upper Cove to Colliers. At one time it was a necessary nuisance, being but a one lane affair.

The story is told that upon one occasion in those early days before the 4-lane highway constructions, two vehicles approached the span, one from each direction. Both drivers pulled onto the overpass and each waited for the other to back off. But apparently both were a little hard-headed, so neither moved. No one knows how long they waited for the other fellow to give in. In all probability the length of time increased with each telling of the incident. But someone must have finally conceded that it was his turn to back up, since when last viewed by this writer, not only was the overpass clear of traffic, but it was also grown over with brush and grass.

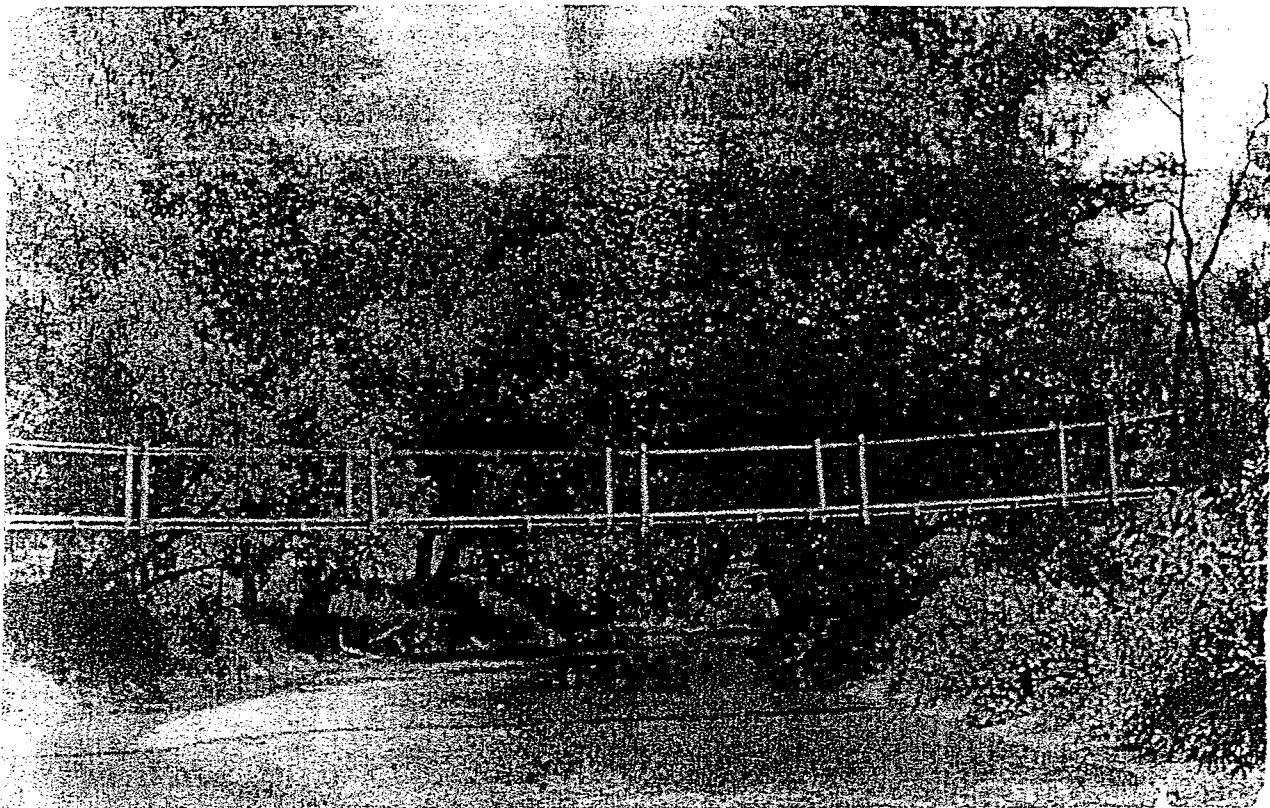
The Three Arch Span over Harmon Creek



The Swinging Bridge over Harmon Creek

In the early days, the Panhandle Railroad went through Hollidays Cove (now Weirton) with a side branch passing up the river toward New Cumberland and points north. Persons living on Main Street and surroundings were forced to cross over Harmon Creek to get to the train station which was known as New Cumberland Junction. The path to get from Main Street to the station went through the property that now houses the Weirton Community Center. But when that path reached the creek, it came to an abrupt halt. Obviously a span of some sort was necessary to get over the waterway.

The problem was solved by building a swinging bridge. A picture of this useful structure is shown below. It served its purpose well, albeit many a plump matron of the Cove of that day crossed it with much trepidation. After all, it did indeed live up to its name - a swinging bridge, and on windy days, the little span moved side to side even more than normally. It was difficult enough to hold on to ones hat while keeping ones skirt down, and next to impossible not to reveal a quick glimpse of a well turned ankle in the process.

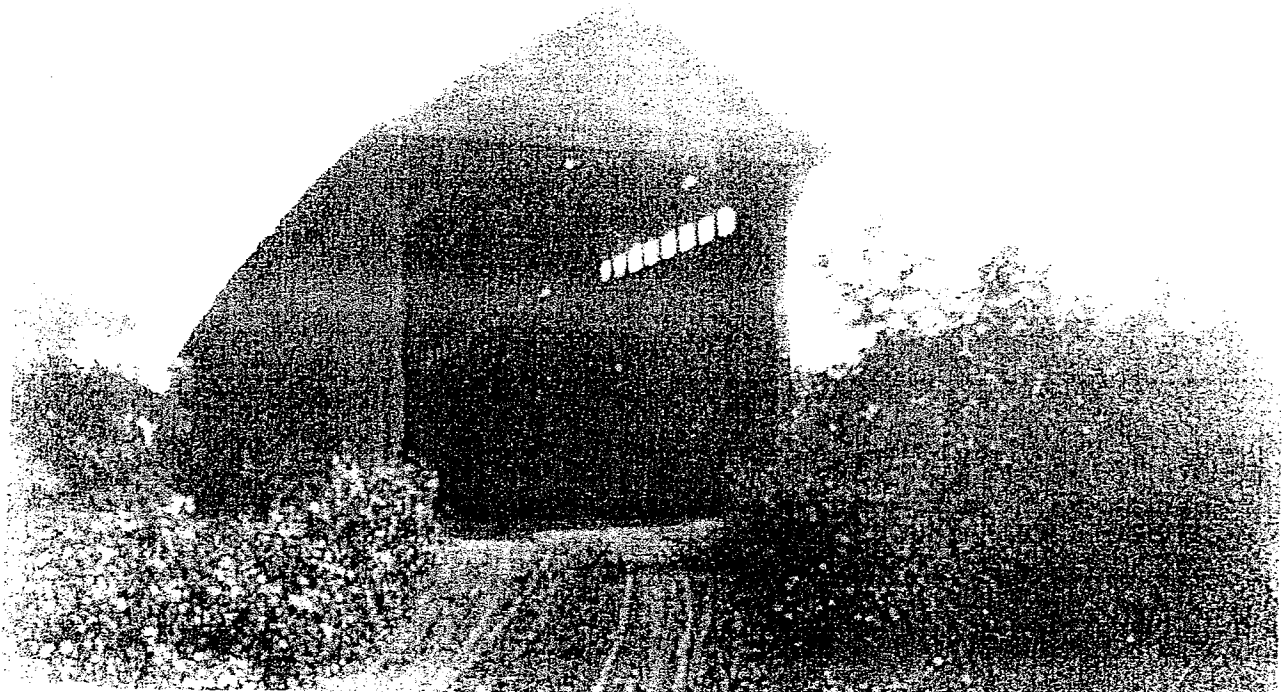


The Covered Bridge at Hanlin Station

A person traveling down the steep, winding hill from Eldersville to Hanlin Station in Jefferson Township, Washington County, PA, is greeted by the old Panhandle Railroad Underpass. Upon emerging from it at the other side, a choice of direction to pursue presents itself. A right hand turn would take the traveler to Dinsmore, then Francis Mine, and finally, Burgettstown. If, instead, the traveler opted to go straight ahead, he would be headed for Old Steubenville Pike and points beyond. Here, his first confrontation in the old days would have been the covered bridge over Harmon Creek pictured here.

The late Warren Columbia, historian of bye-gone days, recalled that in 1904 or 1905, when he was circa 5 years of age, he was on the spring wagon with his father, hauling empty milk cans from the station. Sprinkles turned to torrents of rain as they pulled on to the bridge. As the water became higher, his father whipped up the horses and said, "This is not going to improve!" Shortly after they pulled from the bridge, they heard a crash behind them. Although the bridge had been built high above the water and was reached by ramps, it was no match for the cloudburst. Father and son escaped with their lives. No one alive today, of course, remembers seeing this bridge.

The Covered Bridge over Harmon Creek at Hanlin



"The Rat Hole"

The underpass to end all underpasses once stood on Harmon Creek Road in Brooke County, WV, not far from what old timers referred to as Upper Cove. Today, the best description of its location would be just at the rear of Weirton Lumber Company.

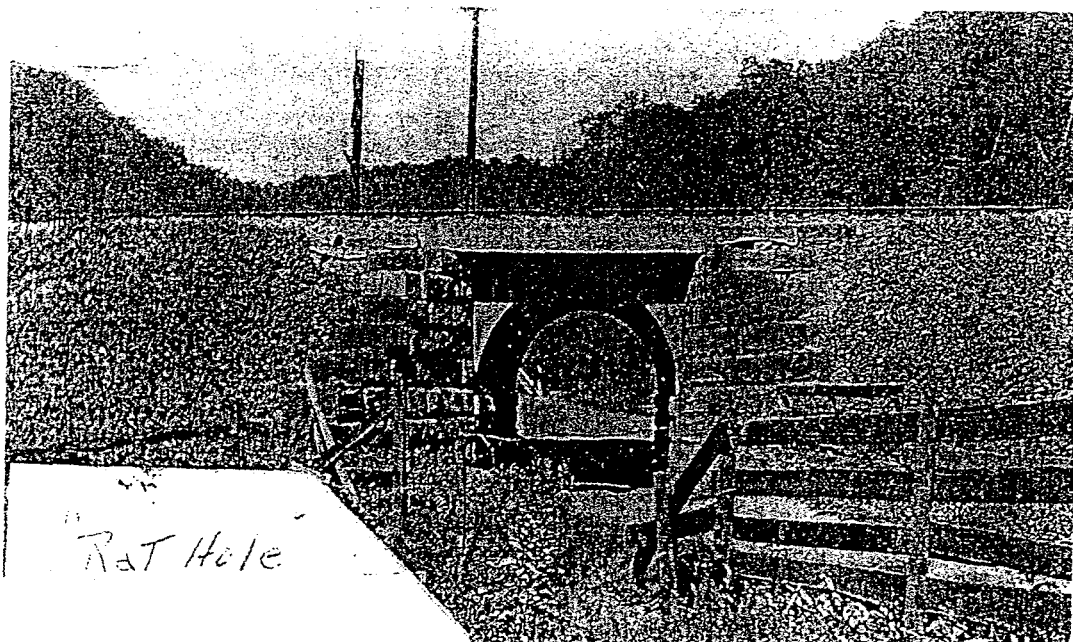
In the days before this underpass was constructed it would have been the emergence of the Panhandle Railroad in the area that prompted its creation. As one approached the Haller Park area of Hollidays Cove when traveling from Colliers toward Weirton it was necessary to cross the railroad somewhere to get to Cove Road.

The solution to this problem was certainly not one that contributed to the esthetic quality of the area, but, it worked. It was in fact, a hideous hole in the earth, one lane wide, with a steep incline on the going-out side of it when coming from Colliers.

When making this journey toward the Cove, the driver was compelled to stop dead on the Colliers end, blow the horn loudly, roll down the window regardless of the weather and stretch the neck to see if some ungracious driver coming from the Cove had beaten him to the pass. If so, someone had to back up until the coast was clear.

On non-school days, little boys, hoping for a nickel or a dime from a grateful driver, often "manned the fort". They took turns going down into the dungeon to direct oncoming traffic, while a cohort stood on the high part of the Cove side of the tunnel and monitored cars from that direction. Little wonder it was given the moniker of "The Rat Hole". Today, the Rat Hole is no longer. And even if the remembrance of it touches a nostalgic note, one is forced to add, perhaps inaudibly, "Thank God!"

The Rat Hole

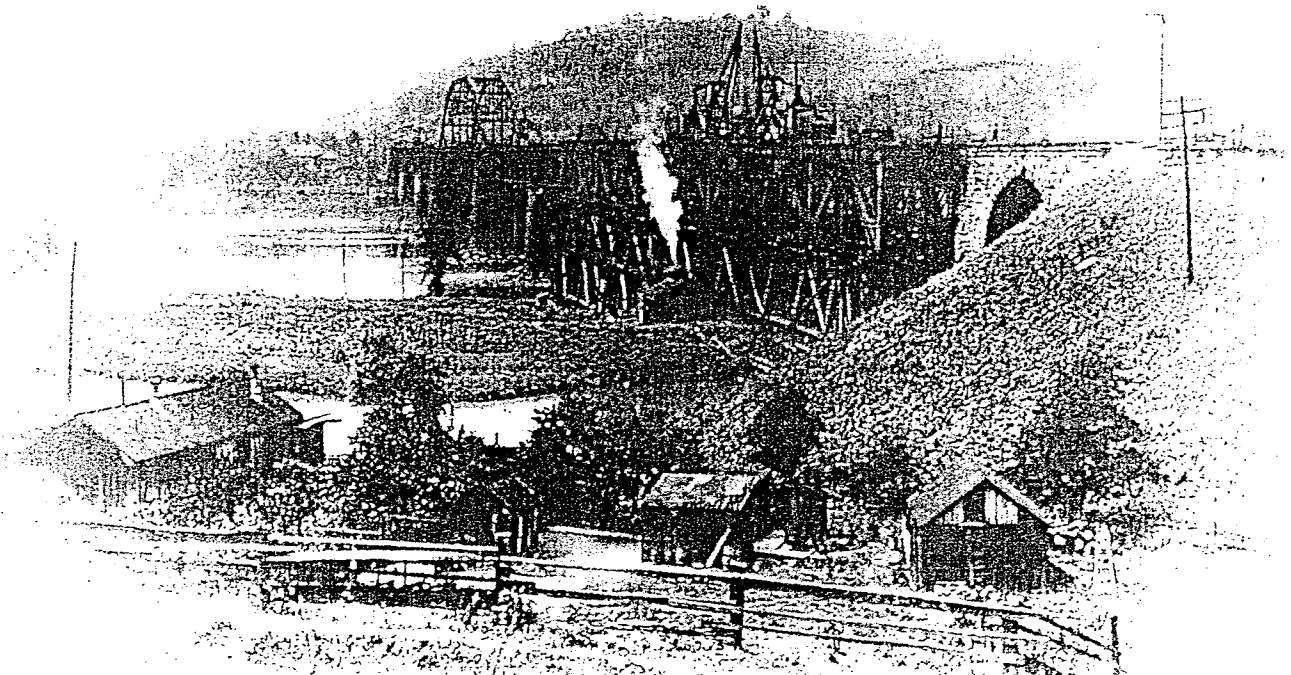


During the building of the railroad in the Hollidays Cove area, many interesting things took place which are worthy of preservation. Persons living today are, for the most part, totally unaware of railroad life in those early times. In pioneer days of railroading, coaches were open, and passengers were forced to carry umbrellas for protection against the sun or the rain. Cross beams overhead were often so low that those riding on the top of a car had to sit down quickly to prevent being hit. Braking was all done by hand and there was always danger of the brakeman losing a finger or two. At places on the track where curves were sharp, it was not unusual for the train to jump the track. When this occurred, farmers were often coaxed to hitch up the team and get the train back in operation.

The local historian of the Cove area, Charlie Campbell, is responsible for this information presented here. His grandfather and uncles were railroad men and passed along to Charlie the love of a train. This author has read several articles written by him about the general operation of the first trains in the area and the problems encountered by the faithful men who operated them. It should therefore be the truth that the information presented here is factual, and not the product of someone's imagination.

One of Charlie Campbell's favorite railroad stories, which he swore to be the truth, was as follows. Number 2 train frequently jumped the track near Wheeling Junction (later known as Weirton Junction). It was the job of an Irishman named Flanagan to report these incidents to the superintendent. Flanagan was a very thorough soul, and wrote lengthy epistles to his boss, giving all of the minute details of the occasion. The time came when his superior decided to put a stop to these lengthy reports. He wrote a terse note to Flanagan, telling him to hereafter cut these messages short. Flanagan complied. The next time the mishap occurred, the Irishman sent the following message. "Number 2. Off again, on again, gone again. Flanagan." Charlie reported that it was a true fact that the once popular "On again, Off again" poem written by Strickland Gillilan, had its inception in this real life incident on the early railroad at Hollidays Cove.

The Railroad Bridge at Weirton Junction near Ferry Glen



New Cumberland Junction
(near Walnut Street, behind the Community Center)
Small building is the Railroad Station.
Large building is the Signal Tower.

