

Servicing a Freight Road

The Atglen & Susquehanna in Martic Township

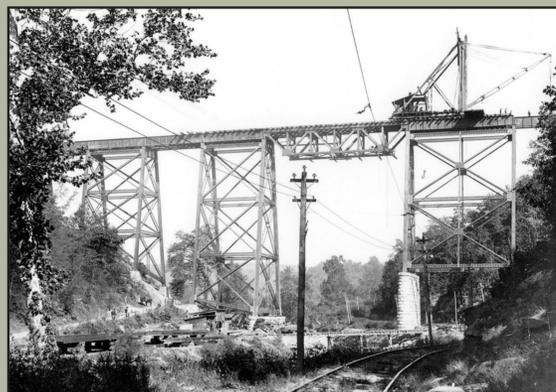


Kline Negative Collection, Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania, Strasburg, PA.

The Martic Forge Bridge (image above and below) soared above Pequea Creek. Its eastern support trestle straddled a trolley line that rambled along the creek, shuttling passengers and packages between Pequea and Millersville. From the hills above the historic valley settlement, one could see the Colemanville Covered Bridge, hung low over the creek, the steadfast

valley crossing. Without hesitation, the PRR spanned the sunken switchback boundary between Martic and Conestoga Townships with what must have appeared to be a minimal lattice of steel. Far removed from the horse-drawn pace of the valley floor, locomotives sailed on their own sky road. For the PRR, the A&S was a means to expansion of its system, not a tool for

local development. Successful long freight operation promised substantial sustainable revenue. The distance between the intent of the original state-chartered railroad—to serve and benefit the citizens of Pennsylvania—and the unbridled PRR of 1906, could be seen by looking upward at the Martic Forge Bridge.



Columbia Historic Preservation Society, Columbia, PA.



James P. Shuman photograph, Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania, PHMC.

Finding a strategic location for servicing the freight route was a challenge for the PRR as the A&S headed west over the deep valley of Pequea Creek (upper left image) toward the Susquehanna River. Facilities were created by carving a wider right-of-way through the fringe of Red Hill. In addition to a switching tower (Smith Tower, image below) this location served as host for a water station, ash dump, employee dwellings, track maintenance storage and the westernmost reservoir of the water distribution system (images on right). A long passing siding and track crossovers made it possible to move an entire train out of dedicated east and west bound traffic. By 1941, the average A&S freight length peaked at 89 cars (3500 to 4000 feet).

In the earlier decades, eastbound steam locomotives rolled along the Susquehanna's edge from Enola Yard on mostly flat ground and needed to “clean their fire” (dump coal ash) and fill their tenders with water before continuing the long gradual ascent to Mars Hill Summit in Bart Township. Smith Tower (originally “SF” for Shenks Ferry) was wedged between the tracks and a rock face, directly below the round valve house and 500,000-gallon reservoir. At peak development, six tracks stretched west of Smith Tower with three of them extending for nearly two miles. The “village” of facilities served the A&S for more than eighty years.



Photo by William R. Fry, Jr., Enola, PA.



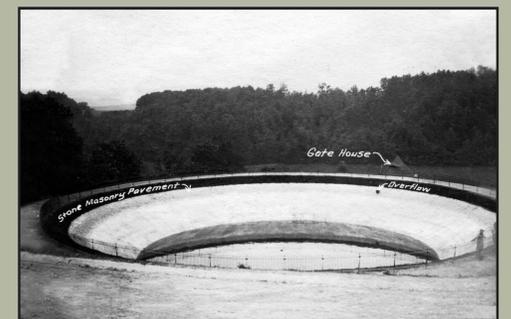
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