A Stream for Steam
The Atglen & Susquehanna in Bart Township

Of all the resources required for operation of the A&S, none was more deceptively vital than water. From its inception under steam locomotion, the A&S was quietly sustained by the vast water resources it continually crossed. Previous droughts and rapidly expanding service throughout Pennsylvania led the PRR to outfit the A&S with a reliable and thoroughly modern water system. When the Octoraro Water Company was formed in 1903 by merger of seven smaller water companies along the A&S route, the PRR was its sole customer. The water within the entire Octoraro Creek watershed (approximately 208 square miles) was at its disposal. Access to this water secured a highly desirable water supply for both the A&S and the PRR’s main line. In the steam era, the estimated average daily consumption from this water system exceeded 2 million gallons per day.

As with many other water systems originally built for the PRR, the infrastructure of the Octoraro Water Company eventually came to serve the residential consumers of its neighboring communities. Though steam locomotives were replaced by electric ones, water continued to power the A&S via hydroelectric energy from Safe Harbor. Idyllic Octoraro Creek, slow and meandering in contrast to the mighty Susquehanna River, helped power one of the nation’s busiest freight roads in the first half of the twentieth century.