Servicing a Freight Road
The Atglen & Susquehanna in Martic Township

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 Pequa 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.