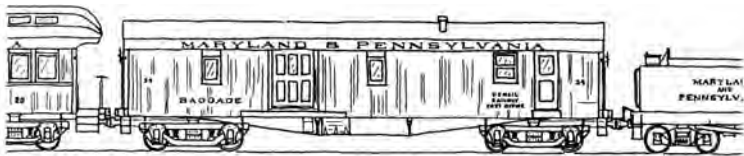


# THE YORK MAIL



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## Carl Seitz: Telegraphy on the Ma & Pa

*Carl Seitz worked for the Maryland & Pennsylvania Railroad as a telegrapher and station agent from 1936 to 1958 with time out to serve in the Army in Europe during World War II. He was interviewed for the Society's Oral History project on October 26, 1997, by Craig Sansonetti. In this issue of the **York Mail** we begin a series of excerpts from that interview. The fol-*

*lowing recollections of how Mr. Seitz learned telegraphy and the role of the telegraph on the railroad were selected from the transcript and edited by Craig Sansonetti.*

**C** Carl, would you start out by telling me how you came to work for the railroad?

**S** Well, I graduated from school in 1932. At

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Carl Seitz began his career on the M&P as telegrapher at Delta. In 1938 he and agent William Ness posed for a photograph in the Delta Station office. (Carl Seitz Collection)

## President's Message

By Jerry McCloskey

*Recently, you should have received an interesting mailing from the Society: the single page, double-sided, 1915-evoking "Help Wanted" announcement. I hope you had the opportunity to read it.*

*That mailing -- as well as your Board of Directors -- urges you to consider becoming a Docent at Muddy Creek Forks. Prior to last year, I would frequently receive a similar notice and tell myself "maybe some day". Last year, I took the plunge and became a docent serving in the store and ticket office. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience and most certainly will serve again this year.*

*The process is not at all daunting. There is a one day training session scheduled for April 18th from 10:00 to 3:00 at the store. When I attended last year, I only knew about a quarter of those who were present. That lasted all of fifteen minutes as the camaraderie is pervasive. I am one of the charter members of the Society, yet I was struck by how much I learned that day. Everything you need to know will be covered and you can select the area in which you'd like to serve. Hey, you get a free lunch too!*

*The time investment is less than I thought it would be. Last year, I served four Sunday afternoons. The experience in watching the faces of our visitors when they come through the door is truly invigorating, as are the "I had no idea this was here" comments. Memories flow, and I frequently learned things I didn't know. Last year, a woman visiting the site returned the following weekend with a sack labeled "A.M. Grove." The sack had been used by the mill in servicing her grandfather's business many years ago. She wanted us to have it.*

*I also had a misconception about being a docent that was corrected last year. I had assumed that docents were dispensers of information -- "teachers" in a sense -- and indeed, they are. What I had totally overlooked is that docents are also students! I was amazed at what I learned.*

*I'd wager that you too will be surprised at what you'll learn. Treat yourself to an education by attending the training, and hopefully you'll decide to become a docent too!*

*Thanks for your support..*

*Jerry McCloskey*

## Telegraphy, cont.

that time it was a time of depression you know, the Depression we had in the United States. I did a few odd jobs for the next year or so. I had an uncle who was the telegraph operator and agent at Felton where I lived. And he asked me whether I would like to learn telegraphy, and I said, "Well yes, it sounds interesting to me." So he said, "OK. I'll teach you and it won't cost you anything, but if I want to go away some time I'd like you to substitute for me." So that's how I started out. I guess it was 1934 when I first started taking lessons from him down in the railroad station alongside the railroad track there in Felton. [Carl's uncle was Newton T. Logan, who was the station agent at Felton for 55 straight years. He was hired by the York Southern Railroad on July 4, 1898, and continued as agent until his retirement on May 1, 1953, at which time the agency at Felton was closed.] Of course, you have the Morse code which you have to learn and then you have the telegraph instrument, which is a little more complicated than what you think it is because for every dot there are two sounds and for every dash there are two sounds except the dash is a longer sound than the dot you know.

*At this point we paused briefly while Carl left the room and returned with a telegraph key and sounder.*

**C** OK. We've got in front of us now the telegraph instrument. This is the one on which you learned, you said?

**S** Yes. That's right.

**C** And now I'm understanding that when you said about there being two sounds, one is the sound of it pulling when you hit the key . . .

**S** Yeah, when you hit the key see there's two sounds there. That's a dot. This would be a dash sound. I guess it took me close to a year and a half til I became really proficient with it.

**C** Which is more difficult, sending or receiving?

## Telegraphy, cont.

**S** Well, I guess probably the receiving, because when you're sending you know what you're sending. [laughter] But, when you're receiving you're copying behind what's being said because you first have to hear it to write it down. Each person has his own characteristic way of sending. The telegraph was, for many years, the only means of communication between York and Baltimore. One wire on poles that were running along the railroad track, and at Baltimore and York there was a ground wire. I don't know exactly the voltage that was used in each one of these stations, but in our own station we had what is known as a relay which was run by batteries which we made in glass jars and that we would attach from the relay to the instrument. I might as well say now that in each station there was a . . . I suppose you would call it a switch board so that if a wire was broken south or north, because there was battery in York and battery in Baltimore, you could plug in on either side and tell whether it was north or south of your station.

When the call was made for your station, the call for Baltimore was X you know, that was call letter X where the chief dispatcher was, and he would call your station. Each station had its own call letters, for example at Felton it was FN. At Delta it was RH. Why RH I don't know, but that was a nice one . . . dit--di-dit di-di-di-dit . . . like that's RH.

**C** So every station along the line heard everything that was sent by anyone, right?

**S** Yes. Every station that had a telegraph in it. When Baltimore wanted to call a station on the line, such as Felton, he would call the Felton sign a couple times and then give his own sign so that we'd know, whoever was there would know where this originated. If you heard the sign, then you would answer "i" and then give your own sign. And then he would start to transmit whatever message he had to transmit, whether it be a train order or just a message. Each person had his own characteristic way of sending, so that even if you didn't hear the call letter . . . say you

went out into the freight room for a minute and you came back in and the telegraph was going and you heard somebody sending back and forth . . . you could tell where that was coming from because after a while you learned the characteristic of each . . .

**C** Like recognizing somebody's voice.

**S** Yes. That's right. The telegraph was very important in that they could not operate a railroad sending one train or trains out of York and trains out of Baltimore heading for each destination, Baltimore or York, without their meeting somewhere, so they had what they called a train order. When you got a signal from the chief dispatcher . . . it was 31, that was the signal for a train order .

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## Telegraphy, cont.

**C** That indicated that a train order was following?

**S** That's right. And then, you immediately pulled . . . Each station had what was called a red eye or a flag, a red signal. It was normally parallel *[to the track]*. It was probably three feet long and about eighteen inches wide and it had two holes in it and it was red and then right around the holes it was painted white, so they called it a red eye.

**C** Is this the same thing that I've sometimes heard called an order board?

**S** Well, I never heard it termed an order board, but maybe that's what they were talking about. So the first thing you did just as soon as you answered *[the dispatcher's call]* you pulled . . . *[the red eye]* on a chain . . . The chain was fastened on the inside and when you released the chain the board would automatically go perpendicular to the track. No train or anybody dare pass that point without coming into the station and finding what it's all about. Usually the passenger trains, because of their schedules, had a normal passing place. But if something happened along the way that delayed them some then . . .

Every time a train was dispatched or passed your station you had to report to Baltimore what it was. For example, the train out of York in the morning was number 8, so you gave number 8 and the time they passed, you know. And the same way with the freight train. With freight trains it was a little more difficult because you never knew what work they had to do along the road, getting cars and so forth. Let's say, for example, that the freight out of Baltimore and the freight out of York were coming in their directions, north and south directions, and it looked like the logical place for them to meet was Delta. Then an operator on either side of Delta station, the next operator, like Whiteford would be the one on the south and Muddy Creek Forks would be the one on the north . . .

**C** There wasn't a telegraph station between

Delta and Muddy Creek Forks? That's a pretty long stretch.

**S** No. At one time there was. I think when I first came to work for the railroad there was one at Bridgeton but that wasn't there too long. In fact, I worked there a day or so. But anyway, the operator at Muddy Creek Forks *[set the flag out]* and the train had to stop whether it was a hand car, a section car, or not had to stop and go in and see the agent to see what message there was. And the same way at Whiteford, Maryland. He would read the order and see where the passing point was. He would sign his name, and then the operator would indicate to Baltimore *[the dispatcher]* that he had received this order and then he could go.

**C** He signed something that he left with you, the agent, indicating he had received it?

**S** Well, he had a copy of it. It was in duplicate so that he got a copy of it. He got the original, and we retained a copy on file. Any time the signal was out where there wasn't a train order involved, for example if the track section gang had to go say from Red Lion to Brogueville or something like that and there was, of course, the freight train was coming north or the passenger train was coming north, and they had . . . they knew whether they had time enough to make it according to the schedule of the passenger train, they would have to get a clearance card from the agent before they could pass and go. And that's generally what the train order signal and the train order involved, and then of course you would get messages about different things along the line. For example, there was a carload of something to pick up at Woodbine or what have you. It was a very useful means of communication and simple as far as line construction was concerned. We had a man who had a motorcar and would drive up and down the line and check it every once in a while. If there was a problem, they would get in touch with him. So much for telegraphy as it was involved in the operation.

## What's in your attic?

by Jerry McCloskey

As any fan of the Ma & Pa knows, the Maryland portion of the line was scrapped in 1958. With the exception of the immediate vicinity of the York city area, the Pennsylvania district of the original Ma & Pa ceased effective service in the late 70's. Hence, even the "youngest" of photographs and artifacts are 50 or 30 years old respectively. Of course, most are much older. The railroad continues to pass deeper into history.

So too are those who shot those photographs and secured the paper and artifacts. We owe them a lot and their collections have become the very essence of preservation and historical accuracy. A major challenge for museums and preservation entities is to be in position to have access to those items as they change hands. This is particularly true in dealing with the estates of those who built the collections.

Recently, the death of a well-respected collector caused his sizeable assemblage of photographs and papers to become available. Much of what he had acquired pertained to the Ma & Pa. The collector apparently did not specify plans in his will to convey the intact collection to an appropriate custodian who would share it with the public. Hence, the items were sold at auction to someone who is now profiting tremendously by selling individual items

on eBay. The auction-purchaser has been contacted, acknowledged having acquired about 5000 pieces from the collection and reaffirmed his intention to continue listing and selling them singularly. Some items have sold for more than \$80. The result is that the recently deceased gentleman's superb collection is being irretrievably dispersed to untraceable owners at prices that make it impossible for museums and historical societies to acquire and preserve.

As fewer living people remember the Ma & Pa, artifacts, paper and photographs become increasingly important to the Society's ability to interpret the line to the public. Leaving collections to the Society is a vehicle to share the legacy of the railroad permanently and publicly. Further, the collector/donor is credited and remembered.

We ask your support and involvement in continuing to secure and preserve those irreplaceable items. If you own a collection applicable to our mission, please consider your plan for that collection's survival and permanence. If you know someone possessing a collection of that ilk, please ask them to consider its survival. In either event, please contact any member of the Board of Directors to discuss further.

## Track Report

by Mike Shay

On a bitter cold January day, the track gang started surfacing the track at the S-2 curve. Surfacing is a railroad term which means bringing the track to the correct elevation and proper gauge while making sure the ties are held in place by tamped gravel. Track jacks are placed under the rail at every 4th tie on the inside rail. The track is then jacked up to the required height. Then the ballast is tamped tightly around and under the ties with a shovel or a tamping machine. The same thing happens on the outside or "high rail". On a curve the outside rail is elevated above the inside rail. The higher elevation helps keep a train on a curved track. In February and March we continued to surface the curve at S-2.

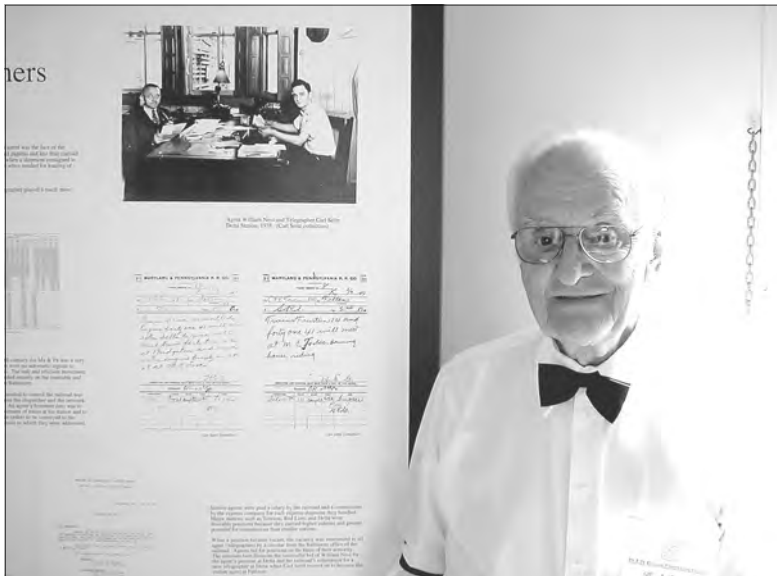
We also laid a temporary track across the B-4 bridge so that we can gain access to the 800 ft of right-of-way north to Laurel siding. The

plan is to re-lay as much track as we can. That way we will be able to finish during the **Spring Work Camp on June 8-13**. We also need to finish surfacing the curve at S-2 and fix a kink in the rail where a large tree fell on the tracks and pushed the track out of alignment. I would like to thank the following volunteers for their help: Joe Kane, Jim Kuhlman, Pete Tinsley, John von Briesen, Gary Gadziala, Craig San-sonetti, and Sam Bistline. If you are interested in helping out at Spring Work Camp or on Saturdays when we do track work, you can call Mike Shay at (717)244-0561 or e-mail Mshay21@comcast.net.

**MARK YOUR CALENDARS!**

## Carl Seitz 1914-2009

Carl E. Seitz, Ma & Pa telegrapher and station agent, and a valued friend and supporter of our Society, died on February 2, 2009. To the end of his long and varied life he remained committed to the art of telegraphy and the preservation of the railroad. Last September 20th, at the age of 94, he came to Muddy Creek Forks as he had for each of our previous Heritage Days to demonstrate the telegraph and share his recollections of the railroad with our visitors.



Born in Felton on June 17, 1914, Carl graduated from Red Lion High School during the depths of the Depression when jobs were hard to come by. Fortunately his uncle, Newton T. Logan, was the Maryland & Pennsylvania Railroad station agent at Felton. Logan offered to teach him telegraphy and there, in the Felton station, Carl learned Morse code and practiced until he became highly skilled in sending and receiving.

Having proven his competence by substituting for his uncle and for agents at other stations along the line, Carl was hired by the railroad in 1936 as clerk-telegrapher

at the Delta station. During his service as the second man there, he continued to be called on to substitute for vacationing agents at other stations. As a result he had the unique distinction of having worked at least once at every agency station on the railroad. He was even called to Baltimore for a week to substitute for the chief dispatcher, clear evidence of the high regard in which he was held by the management of the M&P.

Although the railroad provided steady employment in hard economic times, it didn't take long for Carl to realize that he would never be able to get ahead on his meager telegrapher's salary. After two appeals to M&P president O. H. Nance for an increase in pay were rejected, he recruited other telegraphers to organize a union affiliated with the Baltimore & Ohio Division of the Order of Railroad Telegraphers. Eventually virtually all of the M&P telegraphers joined the union and negotiated successfully as a group for higher wages. In 1940 Carl was elected chairman of the M&P district of the union, a post he held until 1962.

In June, 1941, Carl advanced from telegrapher at Delta to agent at the one man Fallston station. He served there until March of 1942 when the buildup of United States armed forces for World War II prompted him to enlist in the Army. While serving in Europe, and rising to the rank of captain, he stayed in touch with the railroad headquarters in Baltimore sending home first hand news of the war.

After the end of hostilities, in April of 1946, Carl was discharged from the Army and applied under terms of the telegrapher's agreement to return to the railroad. Despite his union activities, O. H. Nance welcomed him back and offered to let him choose to work any station on the railroad. He chose Red Lion, arguably the most important station between York and Baltimore. Manufacturing there was at its peak, and carload freight traffic at the station was well over 100 cars per week. For 12 years Carl was clerk-telegrapher at the Red Lion station, but in the end the seniority system established by the tele-

## Carl Seitz, cont.

graphers' union agreement cost him his job. When the Maryland District of the M&P was abandoned in June of 1958, telegraphers from stations on the south end moved north, displacing Pennsylvania employees with lesser seniority. Carl Seitz was the most senior telegrapher on the railroad to lose his position.

Subsequently he held responsible civic positions as Board Secretary and Business Manager of the Red Lion Area School District from 1958 to 1971, as Red Lion Borough Manager from 1971 to 1979, and as Chairman of the Red Lion Centennial Celebration in 1980. But he never lost his interest and affection for the railroad. When abandonment was imminent in the early 1980's he was an outspoken proponent of preserving the line for excursion service, and in 1997 when our Society's control of the railroad right of way was threatened by adverse legal decisions, he wrote an Op-Ed piece for the York Dispatch defending our position and urging that legal technicalities be put aside in recognition of the historic, recreational, and economic benefits preservation of the railroad would bring to York County.



As a member of our Society, Carl was a significant contributor to several of our most important events. Most memorably he served as the station agent for our first Heritage Day in 1999, returning to the chair and desk at which he substituted for Jess Wambaugh 60 years before. He spoke eloquently of the men with whom he served on the railroad at our celebration of the return of Locomotive No. 82 to Muddy Creek Forks. He gave us an extensive oral history interview, preserving for us his knowledge of the railroad and his perspective as an agent-operator. And he came back to Heritage Day year after year with his telegraph instrument and the memories that delighted our visitors.

Carl Seitz was a gentleman, a man of great ability and integrity, and a true friend to all who loved the railroad. He will be missed.

## Looking for a Few Good Modelers

If you love to work on railroad equipment but prefer a scale a bit smaller than 12" to the foot, you may be just the person we need. Plans are being made to add models illustrating types of equipment that ran on the M&P and its predecessor railroads to the Timeline display on the second floor of the store. As a first step we are looking for skilled modelers who will volunteer to build, paint, letter, and weather a number of HO scale craftsman kits of the type produced by Westerfield or Funaro & Camerlengo. Kits will be furnished by the Society. As we progress there will likely be a need to modify commercially available models and to scratch build items that are unavailable.

If this sounds like your kind of railroading, contact Craig Sansonetti by phone at 301-963-2841 or by e-mail at [sansonet@erols.com](mailto:sansonet@erols.com) to discuss what you can do.



## It's Not Too Late !

The Society's 2009 Docent Day is just around the corner, but there's still time for you to register to attend. Dig out that registration form you got in the mail and send it in, or contact Bob Wieners by phone at 443-922-9216 or by e-mail at [rjwien@aol.com](mailto:rjwien@aol.com) for more information.

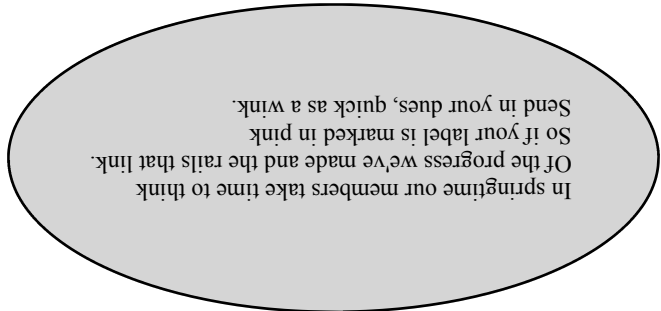
Every Docent Day is new and different with added information for both experienced docents and first time volunteers. Newly uncovered facts from A. M. Grove's diaries and special training for mill docents including our recently installed roller mill will be among this year's features. Don't miss out on the camaraderie, fun, and satisfaction of being part of our corps of docents.

**Our Society needs you  
as a docent for the upcoming summer**

**Explore the possibilities**

***Saturday, April 18, 10 AM to 3 PM***

Free Lunch and training materials will be provided for all registrants.



In springtime our members take time to think  
Of the progress we've made and the rails that link  
So if your label is marked in pink  
Send in your dues, quick as a wink.