LOOKING BACK WITH
DAVE GRATZ

"One picture is worth ten thousand words" – Fred R. Barnes, 1927

Fading photographs.

Is there anyone who has not lingered over an old picture, fascinated by the faces of ancestors or intrigued at the transformation of a streetscape since the photo was taken? To a historian, finding an old photograph is like striking gold. What a thrill to discover a forgotten box in a dark corner of the attic, gently blow the dust from its top, and gingerly lift the lid to reveal a heap of ancient black-and-white photographs, awaiting their first viewing in decades.

But what would you do if faced with the following dilemma? Imagine that you know the exact location of a treasure trove of old photographs, many depicting historic scenes in the Brownsville area, images that were captured on film as long ago as 1903. Imagine also that we are not talking about a box or two of old pictures, but rather a mind-boggling lode of more than eleven thousand historical photographs and negatives.

Let us imagine one more thing – that you become aware of the possibility that this amazing collection of irreplaceable photographs, many of them on fragile glass negatives, is in jeopardy of being discarded or removed from the community forever.

What would you do?

As you may have guessed, the preceding situation is not imaginary. In 1987, Brownsville's Dave Gratz found himself living this very scenario. A few weeks ago, as Dave and I relaxed on the back porch of his Lewis Street home, he told me his unusual story.

"In 1987," Dave said, "when I was superintendent of the Monongahela Railway, a disturbing comment was made to me one day. An official of the P&LE [which co-owned the Monongahela Railway] said, 'Dave, steel has gone out of the valley, and that is going to ruin the P&LE railroad.'

"Then not long after that, the president of the P&LE called and told me, 'We're starting to liquidate some of our assets.'

"I said to him, 'That means the Monongahela Railway.'

"And he said, 'Yes.'"

It was the beginning of the end of the Monongahela Railway. Fortunately, Dave Gratz is a lover of history, particularly railroad history, and he found himself in a unique position to preserve an irreplaceable part of Brownsville's historical record.

"In September 1990," Dave said, "when I realized the Monongahela was going to be married to Conrail and absorbed into their system, I asked to purchase the photographic records of the Monongahela Railway. They were kept in the railroad's vault in the Union Station building in downtown Brownsville. I was able to purchase the photographic records − thousands of negatives dating back to 1903 − and the two tall double-door cabinets in which they were stored.

This photo, one of 319 pictures included in the book "The Monongahela Railway," was taken by a railroad photographer on March 20, 1929, just two months after the dedication of the new Union Station in Brownsville.

"After I bought them, we had to move them up here to my house. Before we could bring the cabinets here, we had to unload the cabinets, bring all of the negatives and plates up here, store them, and then bring the cabinets up. My friend Harold Richardson and I went to the Union Station building and packed some of the negatives into boxes, and every evening I would bring a few boxes of negatives home from work."

"You are using the terms 'negatives' and 'plates,'" I said. "What

proportion of the collection consisted of regular acetate negatives and what proportion consisted of glass negatives (plates)?"

"I would estimate that about three-fourths of the cabinet space is devoted to glass plates. Of course, a glass plate takes up a lot more room than a regular negative. There are 6,400 glass plates and nearly 5,000 acetate negatives – over 11,000 in all. Until the day I moved the cabinets to my house, I had plates and negatives all over the basement.

"After I got all of the negatives to my house, then we got the cabinets up here. I decided that my wife Betty and I could take the cabinets down to the basement by ourselves. Wrong!

"They are big and awkward, but not heavy. The problem was that there is a sharp turn at the top of my basement stairs, so these tall cabinets had to be nearly vertical to make the bend. I had one on a dolly, and I said to Betty, 'You just push it off over the edge of the step, and I'll catch it and let it down.'

"Well, it got away from me and knocked me down the steps, and I took seven stitches in my head. It was a traumatic affair. So the other cabinet stayed upstairs until I got more help, got it downstairs, and then put the negatives back into the cabinets."

"Then about five years later," I said, "you got the telephone call that started a nine-year-long project that I came here today to discuss with you – your new book detailing the entire history of the Monongahela Railway."

"That's right," Dave said. "Terry Arbogast called me one night and asked me if I would put together a history of the Monongahela Railway, and I told him that I would."

"Who is Terry Arbogast?"

"Terry is a retired science teacher from Fairmont who taught in the Monongalia School District in Morgantown. He is also a railroad enthusiast with journalism experience who has taken thousands of railroad photographs."

"When did Terry contact you?"

"Terry called me sometime between when I acquired the plates and 1995, because I started writing the history in 1995 while Betty and I were in Florida. I took the index books down there to help me organize the book."

"What are index books?"

"The index books are the notebooks in which I had listed each negative in the collection. I was going to see if I could categorize the photographs by subject, believing that the number of photographs on each subject would indicate the importance of each topic. Well, it didn't exactly work that way."

"You have explained how you got the pictures for the book," I said. "How did you acquire the information that enabled you to write the entire history of the Monongahela Railway?"

"I had the benefit of Church's book [*Corporate History of the Monongahela Railway Company, 1927* by S. H. Church and Andrew Cunningham], a 1927 legal history that I cited in my book's bibliography," Dave replied, "and I consulted documents from the railroad. I learned a great deal about the railroad's history during my career there, and over the years I picked the brains of my predecessors.

"I tried to develop the story the same way the railway itself developed. At first, I had assumed that it was just the PRR [Pennsylvania Railroad] and the P&LE [Pittsburgh and Lake Erie] that got this railroad going in 1902. But while I was doing some real estate work as part of my job at the railroad, I wondered how the railroad could own property whose deeds pre-dated the creation of the Monongahela Railroad.

"I found out that the PV&C [Pittsburgh, Virginia & Charlestown] had started building the tracks from up near Huron, had come from Uniontown over to the Monongahela River by way of the Coal Lick Run branch, the Masontown-New Salem branch, and the Brown's Run branch, and then had branched up and down the river. It was only then that the PRR and P&LE formed the Monongahela Railroad, which became the Monongahela Railway Company in 1915 when it consolidated with the Buckhannon & Northern Railroad.

"Well, that was the start of *my* history lesson," Dave chuckled. "I worked on the book's text year-round, and it took me about three years to put things together."

"Terry Arbogast is your co-author," I said. "What was Terry's role?"

"He suggested that I write the book, and he prepared the photographs for publication and drew all of the maps for the book, which contains 319 photographs and 24 detailed hand-drawn maps.

"Terry is a perfectionist," Dave continued. "He would look at the pictures that I already had, some of which were old prints from the negatives, and would often decide that a photograph was not good enough for reproduction. He would take the negative home and reproduce it on polycontrast paper, since the publisher had told us that you have to make it a little bit grayer because when you scan it, it turns darker.

"Then when he saw how the book was progressing, he started creating the detailed maps that are interspersed throughout the book. The maps that he originally drew were not satisfactory to him, so being a

perfectionist, he did them all a second time."

"One of the most important decisions in producing a book like this," I said, "is finding a publisher. How did you do that?"

"Terry had met the fellow who was going to publish it at those railroad shows he goes to," Dave said. "The fellow does real nice books, and he agreed to do our book."

Unfortunately, just as getting those empty cabinets down Dave's basement stairs was not as simple an undertaking as it first appeared, what should have been a relatively straightforward task – getting the book published after the text was written and the photographs were ready – turned into a nightmare. Next, Dave and Terry will describe how their effort to publish the definitive history of the Monongahela Railway was sidetracked into court and nearly derailed.

MONONGAHELA RAILWAY BOOK ENCOUNTERED UNEXPECTED HURDLE

Who knew it would be this difficult?

When Terry Arbogast of Fairmont, West Virginia, contacted Brownsville's Dave Gratz in 1995 to ask him to write a history of the Monongahela Railway, the plan that evolved during discussions between the two men was simple. The new book would include Dave's detailed history of the Monongahela Railway and be illustrated with several hundred photographs from two rich sources: the 11,000-negative photographic library of the Monongahela Railway that Dave had purchased in 1990, and the thousands of contemporary railroad pictures that Terry, who is a rail buff, has personally photographed over the past forty years.

Their task – to produce a complete history of the Monongahela Railway that would be packed with hundreds of photographs – was a daunting but straightforward one, a labor of love that would be their nostalgic tribute to a lost railroad. Dave began writing the text in 1995, while Terry worked in his darkroom producing high quality prints, many from glass plate negatives that were as much as one hundred years old.

Dave Gratz had worked for the Monongahela Railway for most of his adult life, so his reason for wanting to produce the definitive history of the Monongahela Railway is more easily discerned than that of his co-author, Terry Arbogast.

"Did you work for the railroad at any time in your life?" I asked Terry, who spoke with me by telephone from his home in Fairmont.

"No one in my family ever worked for the railroad," Terry

chuckled, "but my uncle Jack Smith was always interested in trains, and on weekends he would take me to see them at a rail yard near my home. I grew up walking the Monongahela Railway tracks here in Fairmont, became interested in trains, and in the early 1960s took a lot of snapshot pictures, particularly of steam engines."

"So you have been taking rail pictures most of your life?"

"I estimate that I have taken over 40,000 slides and 20,000 negatives," Terry said. "I'm fifty-eight, so that represents about forty years of photographic work."

"You prepared most of the photographs for the book that you and Dave Gratz have co-authored," I said. "What background do you have in that area?"

"For eighteen months in the late 1960s and early 1970s, before I began my twenty-five-year career as a science teacher in the Monongalia County schools in Morgantown, I worked for the Fairmont *Times* and the *West Virginian*. While working there I gained valuable experience in the layout of text and illustrations, photography, and the publishing business."

"I am curious," I said, "as to what led you to contact Dave Gratz with the idea of producing a history of the Monongahela Railway."

"I knew Dave Gratz long before we collaborated on this book," Terry revealed. "Back in the 1970s, I visited him at the Monongahela Railway offices in the Union Station building in Brownsville, and he permitted me to examine the railroad's photographic files and use the darkroom facilities there to print some of them, with a copy for the railroad."

"Are the glass negatives difficult to work with?"

"You just have to be more careful with them. They are very fragile."

"So by 1995 you had known Dave for quite some time, and you knew that he had purchased the railroad's photographic records. When Dave agreed to write the railroad's history, what was to be your role in co-authoring the book?"

"I printed about eighty-five per cent of the pictures that are in the book. Dave had a lot of prints in addition to the negatives, but some of them were printed decades ago and were yellowing. I reprinted them for the book. I also drew the twenty-six maps that are found throughout the book, maps which show the sidings, railroad structures, and mines, and also contain other information based upon my examination of Monongahela Railway documents, timetables, and siding diagram books that Dave supplied. I drew the maps back in the mid-1990s, and then I wasn't satisfied with them, so I re-did all of them."

Terry also wrote some of the book's text. "I wrote the chapter on the Scotts Run Railway," he said, "and Dave wrote the other chapters and all of the captions for the pictures."

Dave Gratz worked for three years writing the history of the Monongahela Railway, and during that time Terry worked in his home in West Virginia, creating the maps and preparing the photographs they had selected for publication. By all reasonable expectations, they had hoped to have the book on the market by 1997 or 1998. The book was finally published last month [July 2004].

I asked Dave Gratz what caused the delay. The story he told me was replete with unfulfilled good intentions, disappointing setbacks, and plenty of frustration.

"The first publisher we worked with," Dave said, "did really nice books, and he agreed to do our book. It was his custom to do one book at a time, working out of his house, where he had a nice working lab. He usually published three books a year."

"You wrote the text," I reviewed, "and Terry prepared the photographs, drew the maps and wrote one chapter. What was the publisher supposed to do?"

"His job was to lay out each page on his computer," Dave explained, "arrange to have the book printed, and market it. He would scan each photograph into the computer, which is a time-consuming process, create the layout of each page, position each captioned photograph in the appropriate place to match the text, get the book printed and help us sell it. He intended to put together several chapters every three or four months, so I was captioning all of these pictures and sending them to him to be scanned."

"Sounds like a good plan. When did you hire this fellow to do your book?"

"Terry and I signed our contract with him on June 4, 1995. We were hoping that the book would be done by 1996 or 1997.

"But then the publisher got sick, so he was not able to keep working on our book. By 1998 he had recovered from his illness, but we saw that he had other books going, and I started wondering what was going to happen with ours. I was frequently in touch with him about it, but it became clear he was not going to be able to get our book done in a timely fashion.

"We tried to be patient with him, but we eventually had to ask him to return our pictures and materials. He was reluctant to do that, so then we had to hire an attorney and get a court order in order to get our materials back from him. I finally got them back in September 1999. We lost several years there."

"Not to mention that you were back to square one in your search for a publisher."

"That's right. After we had the materials back, I searched around for some other way to get the book printed. I was able to arrange to meet with another publisher, and I took my stuff out to him. He looked it over, agreed to do the book, and after a couple of years of working with him, we finally have it finished."

"It can now be purchased?"

"Yes. I received the first hardbound copy from the printer about three weeks ago. We had two thousand copies printed, and most of them are now at my house. Some

Dave Gratz, 2010

have been placed at the Flatiron building for sale, and we hope to market it through rail fan magazines and web sites and at other venues as well."

Next, our series concludes with a detailed look at the contents of this impressive new book, *The Monongahela Railway: Its History and Operation, 1903-1993*, by Dave Gratz and Terry Arbogast. We will also learn about the Monongahela Railway photographer who took many of the historic pictures that appear in the book, and I will provide details on how interested readers may order this book by mail.
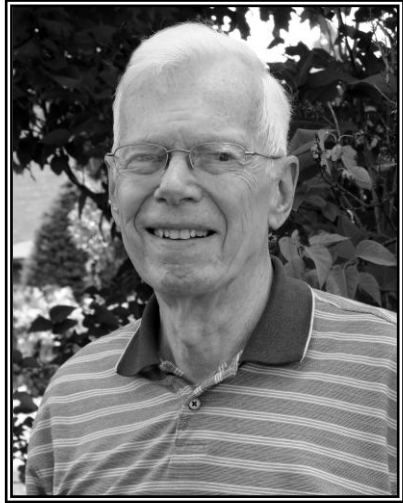
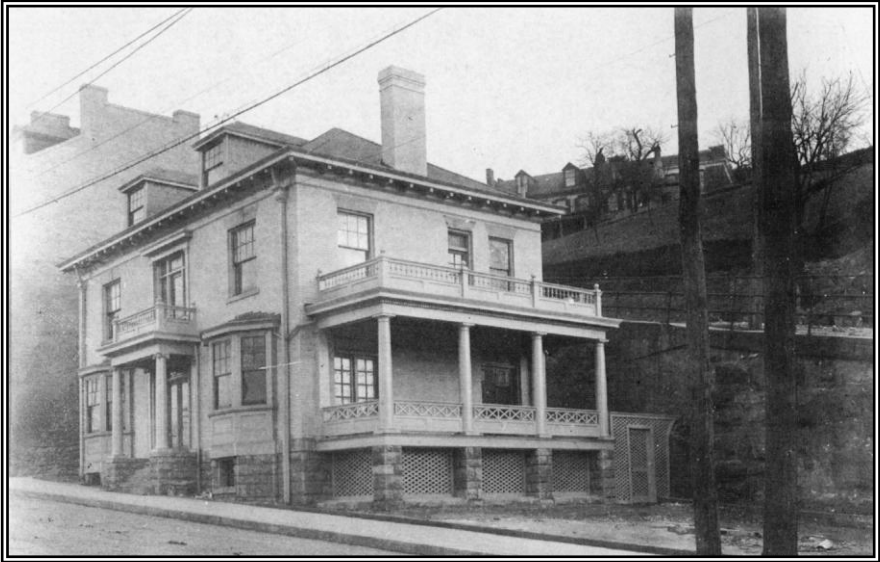### HISTORY OF THE MONONGAHELA RAILWAY IS NOW AVAILABLE

In the first two articles of this series, I wrote about an effort by two men to produce a comprehensive history of the Monongahela Railway in words and pictures. During the past two weeks, several readers have asked me how they may purchase *The Monongahela Railway: Its History and Operation, 1903-1993* by David E. Gratz and Terry E. Arbogast. In today's final article in the series, I will pass that ordering information along to you, and Dave, Terry and I will also take a closer look at the story behind the photographs that grace nearly every page of their new book.

Terry Arbogast was in charge of preparing the photographs chosen to be included in the book. He and Dave Gratz had to choose pictures

from Dave's 11,000-negative photographic archive of the Monongahela Railway, from thousands of railroad slides and pictures Terry has taken over the past forty years, and from several other sources of historical photos.

"How did the two of you decide," I said to Terry, "which pictures to put in the book?"

"We originally chose 1,100 photographs to consider for inclusion,"

Market Street residence of the railroad superintendent, with Front Street hill in the background, November 1909. Today this site is occupied by a parking lot for a hair salon. This is one of many photographs in *The Monongahela Railway: Its History and Operation, 1903-1993* that provide views of area communities from a bygone era.

he told me, "and about 320 of them, based on photo quality and subject matter, made it into our 212-page book."

"That leaves more than ten thousand of the Monongahela Railway negatives that didn't make the final cut," I said. "Might we expect to see some of the others in a future book?"

"Dave may collaborate with me on a second book that would have even more photographs in it," Terry said, "perhaps as many as five hundred. I have interviewed hundreds of former railroad workers, and my hope is to publish a book of railroad photos that would be accompanied by stories told by these former railroad employees."

And what about the sixty thousand slides and negatives that Terry

has produced with his own cameras over the past forty years?

"I have been working on ten B&O books for the past eight years," he revealed, "and I also hope to publish two more Monongahela Railway books."

I was interested in learning more about the thousands of negatives in the Monongahela Railway archives, many of them taken by Charles Keibler, Monongahela Railway photographer.

"How far back in time do the photographs go?" I asked Dave Gratz.

"The railroad began in 1902, and the earliest pictures are dated 1903," Dave said. "The railroad photographers usually numbered each photograph and wrote the date right on the negative. There are also a lot of unnumbered negatives in the archives from the Indian Creek and Northern Railway. They were in a box in the Monongahela Railway files. I am guessing that Charles Keibler was able to get the B&O people or the contractor to give them to us. Terry has been working on them, trying to separate them and organize them."

"I can understand why a railroad would want a photographic record of its equipment, its track, even its personnel," I said to Dave, "but I have noticed that some of the pictures in the Monongahela Railway collection do not seem to show anything connected to the railroad. For example, I am thinking of photos that depict the Monongahela Hotel across the street from Union Station or that show the Flatiron building nearby. Do you think pictures of that type were taken as a sort of public service?"

"No," Dave replied without hesitation. "There were several reasons for taking railroad photographs that do not show equipment or track. First of all, the company wanted to have a photographic inventory of the railroad's buildings. I have three loose-leaf books downstairs of the railroad's buildings, and all of the buildings were numbered according to their milepost along the track.

"Another reason for some of those pictures is that when there was an accident, they would go out and take pictures of the scene. Whether it was a crossing accident or a personal injury, the claim agent wanted pictures of the accident. We included a few of those pictures in a chapter entitled 'Accidents, Incidents and Acts of God.' As an example, whenever a train ran into a coal truck, as is shown in the photo on page 161, the railroad took pictures of it.

"Some of the photos were taken from the Union Station building towards other parts of town," Dave continued. "That was early on, and sometimes Charlie Keibler would do that to get used to the new camera. He had a Speed Graphic, which took a 4 by 5 picture, and before that, he used a camera that took a 5 by 7 photo. When they got a new camera, Charles would practice with it and develop the pictures in the railroad's

darkroom in the Union Station building."

"Was that his only job, taking pictures for the railroad?"

"No, he was a draftsman and a photographer. He started working on the railroad when he returned from World War I with a collapsed lung. His dad, Charles W. Keibler, was lockmaster at Lock 5, both when the lock was in Denbo and later when the locks were built in Brownsville."

"Mr. Keibler and the railroad performed a remarkable service for local historians by producing that great archive of photographs," I commented. "Thank goodness you were able to save them. What happened to other types of documents that chronicled the day-to-day operations of the Monongahela Railway?"

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David E. Gratz and Terry E. Arbogast

"Conrail took them all," Dave said, describing the aftermath of the Monongahela Railway's merger with Conrail on May 1, 1993. "We had the original deeds for the railroad's property, and we also had carbon copies in bound books that we used for reference. And Conrail took it all! I thought at least they would leave the carbon copies of the deeds here in Brownsville. They were all hauled off somewhere for storage, probably to Philadelphia. Where they would be now, I haven't the slightest idea."
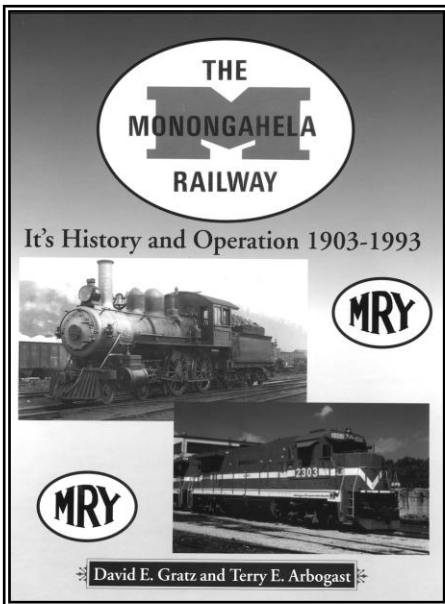
I found it depressing to think that such records, which would be of great interest to Brownsville residents and historians, are languishing somewhere, potentially at the mercy of some bureaucrat's whim to "get rid of those old papers!"

Turning back to a more positive subject, I said to Dave, "Your book, which just went on sale at the end of July, is a hardback edition. What made you decide to do a hardback instead of a paperback?"

"I think it's a nicer book," he said, "and railroad buffs prefer hardbacks."

"How is the book arranged?"

"It is primarily a chronological arrangement, divided into several sections," Dave said. "It begins with the history of the railroad. Then it

goes into the operation of the railroad, explaining in detail how the railroad was run on a daily basis. The third section describes and shows the equipment we used on the railroad. A lengthy appendix includes many charts and maps, as well as some interesting vignettes about railroaders and interesting happenings on the railroad over the years."

"Readers have been asking me how to purchase your book. Where can it be bought?"

"The book is being promoted by the publisher and in rail fan publications and on the internet," Dave said. "People in this area may purchase the book at the Flatiron building or at Nemacolin Castle."

Having read the book, I can vouch for the tremendous accomplishment that Dave Gratz and Terry Arbogast have achieved in producing this history of the Monongahela Railway. The men have combined a great deal of patience, the resources of the railway's 11,000-negative archives and Terry's collection of thousands of pictures, and their own extensive knowledge of the Monongahela Railway to create a book which will be of interest to railroaders and non-railroaders alike.

The community truly owes a debt of gratitude to Dave Gratz and Terry Arbogast for creating a permanent, comprehensive record of a railroad that was an integral part of many peoples' lives throughout the twentieth century in Brownsville.

Update as of summer 2010:

* All of the Monongahela Railway's 11,000 negatives are now housed at the Archive Services Center at the University of Pittsburgh, where the collection is available to the public.

* "The Monongahela Railway: Its History and Operation, 1903-1993" is still available for purchase by mail from BARC (Brownsville Area Revitalization Corporation). The book, which contains 319 photographs in its 212 pages, is $39.95, plus $2.40 tax (for Pennsylvania residents) and $3.00 for shipping. A check for $45.35 (per book) may be written to BARC and mailed with your order to:
BARC
P.O. Box 97
Brownsville, PA 15417