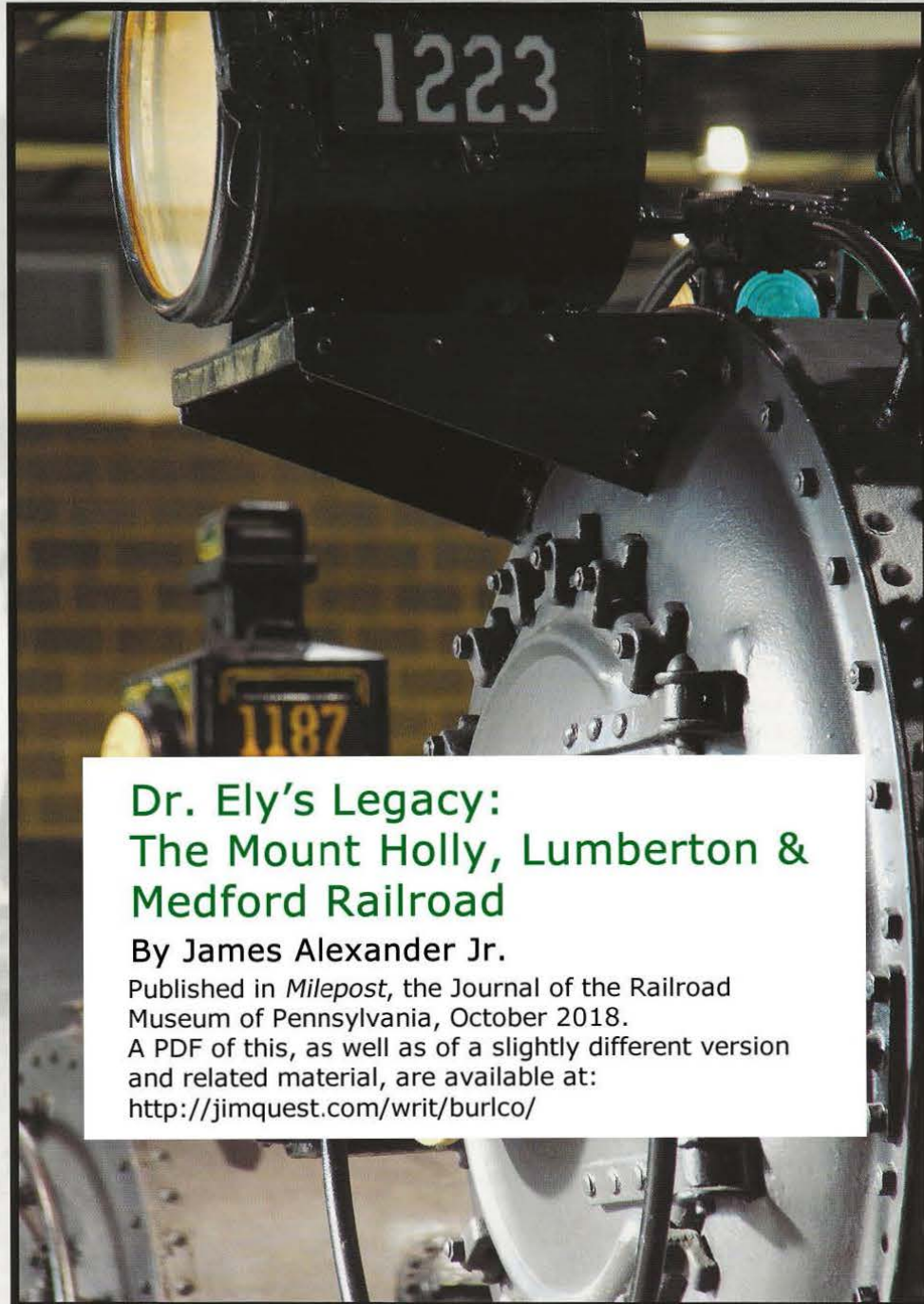


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Dr. Ely's Legacy: The Mount Holly, Lumberton & Medford Railroad

By James Alexander Jr.

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Dr. Ely's Legacy: The Mount Holly, Lumberton & Medford Railroad

by James Alexander Jr



Freight train operated by the Pennsylvania Railroad backing across a farm near Medford. Note what appears to be the brakeman standing on the rear car. Without an active turntable at the Medford end, trains typically backed down from Mount Holly. (Photo courtesy of the Medford Leas Residents Association)

TERRIFIC EXPLOSION OF A LOCOMOTIVE IN MOUNT HOLLY — LOSS OF LIFE — A HORRIBLE SCENE

Excerpted from the Mount Holly New Jersey Mirror, May 26, 1869.

A train operated by the Camden & Amboy Railroad, running on the tracks of the Camden & Burlington County Railroad, left Vincentown, hauling 19 cars with 100 tons of marl. James W. Allen, a civil engineer from Bordentown who had designed the railroad, had arranged to catch a ride back home in the engine's cab.

As the train passed through Mount Holly between Washington Street and Water Street, the engine's boiler blew up. The engine made a tremendous bound into the air, descending with great force, breaking ties, bending rails and scattering pieces of machinery in every direction. As it struck the earth, it made a revolution or two, and another spring into the air, finally lodging in the creek, a distance of 50 yards from the explosion. The track, for some distance, was plowed up, the rails wrenched from the ties and bent and broken in pieces, and the cars thrown together in a confused mass.

The explosion shook houses in the vicinity to their foundations. Job Gaskill, engineer, and Charles S. Platt, fireman, were thrown upon the side of the track, dreadfully mangled and scalded, and died. John A. Sailer, conductor, was thrown under the wrecked cars, covered with marl, but was dug out and survived.

The melancholy occurrence spread a gloom over the whole neighborhood, and for miles around, nothing is spoken of but the suddenness and fatality of the dreadful accident. The company, with remarkable promptness, commenced removing the debris and repairing the track, and soon, trains were running over the road as usual.

In a fortuitous twist of fate, James Allen missed the train and his life was spared, and a good thing it was for the people of the nearby Burlington County towns, for he was in the midst of drafting the plans for the Mount Holly, Lumberton & Medford Railroad. He was able to complete the plans and, when the new railroad started operating by the end of the year, he rode its first official train — in a passenger car. As a full time civil engineer for the Camden & Amboy Railroad, he also served on the board of this local line, something not unusual for the time.

This little six-mile railroad was both typical of its time, and unusual in its development. In the grand scheme of railroad history, it went unnoticed. To the residents, farmers and businessmen of the area, it was critical to their progress. The typical specifics of its railroad operation were not as well documented as for the larger railroads, but the stories of the people and forces involved in its creation provide a fascinating insight into the life and growth of the agricultural and resource-rich hinterlands that supported the country's vibrant cities.

Following the end of the Civil War, the spread of railroads had gained vigor, most prominently with the completion of the cross-continental railroad when two lines met at Utah's Promontory Summit, fulfilling Lincoln's hopes. Historians were to characterize the time as one of "railroad fever," with mighty economic forces building major railroads, and smaller railroads springing up as well. Many railroads changed names,

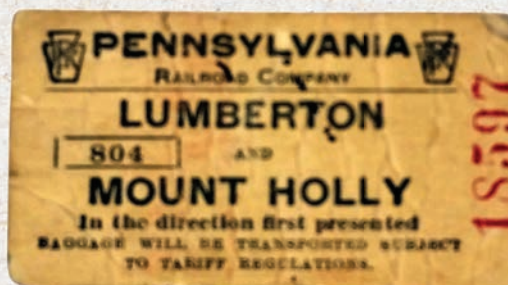
merged and fought. Some smaller local rail-building initiatives were sponsored by the larger lines in their quest for regional dominance and profits.

The Mount Holly, Lumberton & Medford Railroad (MLM), serving part of the fertile agricultural center of Burlington County, New Jersey, was one of those. There was a clear need, and political forces came into alignment to allow its construction.

THE NEED

As one Medford historian would write years later, before the railroad opened in 1869, on a typical summer evening there, one could observe numerous teams of horses pulling farm wagons loaded with produce, headed west from town, on the way to the Philadelphia market. It was described as a very colorful scene in the gathering twilight. As the last of the wagons passed

Lumberton-Mount Holly ticket, 1917. (Graphic courtesy of the author)



Medford's Friends Meeting House on Union Street, its oil lantern faded in the distance on the overnight journey. A very good team could go from Kirby's Mill in Medford to the ferry in Camden in four hours and 15 minutes, but a more typical time was six hours.

After unloading the wagons in Philadelphia and taking the ferry back across the Delaware to Camden, the road home began. The caravan of tired horses would gradually get smaller as the wagons turned into the side lanes leading to their barns. In many instances, the weary farm boys had fallen asleep at the reins, only to awaken in their own farmyards, having been guided home by their knowing teams.

A few miles north of Medford in Lumberton, farmers and small industries were able to load some goods on barges for transport down the Rancocas Creek, which fed into the Delaware River. Mount Holly had similar access to the creek, however, the process was slow and cumbersome, subject to the tidal impacts of the Atlantic Ocean, with the creek gradually silting in and losing navigable depth. Both methods of transport — wagon and boat — were neither efficient nor reliable. Something better was needed.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE RAILROADS

Mount Holly, the county seat, had been reached from the city of Burlington by the Burlington & Mount Holly Railroad in 1849, terminating at a station on Grant Street. The line quickly came under the domination of the Camden & Amboy Railroad (C&A), New Jersey's economic, transportation and political powerhouse at the time. It connected with the C&A's main north-south line along the Delaware.

The operator of the ferry service on the Rancocas Creek, Enoch Barclay Haines, had seen the need for a direct rail route from Mount Holly straight west to the city of Camden, farther south on the Delaware waterfront, and directly opposite Philadelphia. His efforts to obtain a charter from the state legislature were blocked by the C&A, which saw it as competition to its existing route from Burlington. That service had been extended south and then east of Mount Holly to serve the productive marl pits in Vincentown, a source of freight revenue. In fact, the C&A had affiliated with a number of local railroad endeavors in the rich marl belt of southern/central Jersey. At the time, marl, being rich in potash and other minerals, was seen as a valuable soil enhancer and was in great demand by farmers around the state and beyond.

Mount Holly passenger station on Madison Avenue, built in 1867 by the Camden & Burlington County Railroad. It also served the Mount Holly, Lumberton & Medford Railroad starting in 1869. (Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania, PHMC)



Pass signed by H. P. Ely for use until December 31, 1870. This is especially interesting since the line was being operated by the Camden & Amboy Railroad, and 1871 passes were issued by the C&A. This shows one of the few copies of Ely's signature in existence. (Source listing on eBay in 2017, unknown current owner)

Years later, under Pennsylvania Railroad ownership, the line extended eastward to the New Jersey coast, crossing Barnegat Bay and then heading north along the coast; it was referred to as the Back Road, an alternate route to the main line running from Philadelphia to Trenton and on to New York.

Haines, a Quaker, had started his career as a mason and contractor in Philadelphia, accumulating wealth and business stature. When he moved to Lumberton, New Jersey, he was its most wealthy resident, building a barge port on the upper navigable end of the Rancocas Creek, and laying out the streets of what came to be today's Hainesport Township. Anticipating the eventual demise of barge traffic on the creek, he had joined in several local road improvement companies, and lobbied to no avail in Trenton for his railroad from Camden.

So important was the protection of the C&A's statewide monopoly that it maintained offices in Trenton, although its main operating facilities were based in Burlington County's Bordentown. Critical observers at the time claimed that legislators in need of alcoholic sustenance or even short-term loans were known to visit Apartment 10 in Snowden's Hotel, maintained by the railroad near its first station and the State House.

The C&A had its own fascinating history dating back to the early 1800s. Aside from its innovative engineering and aggressive business practices, its domination rested heavily on its close affiliation with Democratic party interests who were in power in Trenton. State laws were essential to the railroad's monopoly. As the canal and railroad empire accrued enemies for economic and social reasons, the state government, with its control of the legislature, came to be labeled by critics as "The State of the Camden & Amboy."

At what was referred to as a midnight orgy, upon the closing of the 1860 session of the legislature, legislators reportedly gathered at Apartment 10 to sing:

*We are all a band of robbers
We are all a band of robbers
From the Camden and Amboy State.*

However, starting in 1857, two Republican governors had been elected, serving for some six years, and again in 1866 for another term. The Republicans made inroads in the legislature as well. The C&A suddenly recognized the need for Republican friends accustomed to the ways of Trenton, and Barclay Haines fit the bill.

Soon, Haines was lobbying in Trenton for the C&A, which interestingly dropped its opposition to his construction of the line from Camden to Mount Holly, which started operation in 1867. In 1866, Haines had been ensnared in a Mercer County grand jury indictment of some 14 people charged with nefarious political activities on behalf of the C&A. Most got off as a result of skilled C&A lawyers and the lapsed memory of key witnesses, but Haines pleaded *non vult contendere*, accepting a fine of \$1,000. It was reported that the C&A quietly reimbursed him later, and his good relations with the railroad empire continued. He was later pardoned, as it appeared he had been honest in intention and just caught up circumstance. Haines' efforts set the stage for yet another connecting railroad.

THE MOUNT HOLLY, LUMBERTON & MEDFORD RAILROAD

In 1866, local leaders of the three communities, including Haines, had obtained a charter for another line to head south from the county seat — the Mount Holly, Lumberton & Medford Railroad Company (MLM). However, it was not until December 1868 that the corporation was fully organized. A series of rapid events over the next year demonstrated that the way had been cleared for this new line. An early tipoff of what was afoot was that in March 1869, the legislature authorized the still-unbuilt line to be leased to another unnamed railroad, which turned out to be the Camden & Amboy. In July, the C&A announced its endorsement of \$75,000 in bonds being floated by the local MLM corporation. Action was assured!

This is the Lumberton passenger station in the foreground and freight station in the background, looking north toward Mount Holly, circa 1900, with stationmaster B. F. Clayberger. (Photo from the C. R. Johnson collection, courtesy of John and Elaine Jardine)

MOUNT HOLLY, LUMBERTON AND MEDFORD RAILROAD COMPANY.

To the Legislature of the State of New Jersey :

The Mount Holly, Lumberton and Medford Railroad Company respectfully report that,
 The capital stock of the company is, \$95,650 00
 The bonded debt is, 75,000 00
 The cost of the road to first month 1st, 1872, including buildings and appurtenances, \$170,650 00

The length of the road as completed is 6.2 miles, and is operated for the Camden and Amboy Railroad and Transportation Company, lessee by the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, lessee of the United Railroads of New Jersey.

The annual rental is 7 per cent. on the bonds and 6 per cent. on capital stock.

H. P. ELY, *President.*

This annual report shows the rental, lease payments, required to be paid by the Pennsylvania Railroad to the Mount Holly, Lumberton & Medford Railroad Company. Payments were required regardless of the profitability of operations. (Graphic courtesy of the author)

The same month, the line's first president, Henry Paxson (H. P.) Ely, one of the original incorporators, issued solicitations for construction, based on the engineering plans drafted by the C&A's James Allen. Grading of the right-of-way started immediately. Barclay Haines was reportedly involved in its construction, as he had been on the Camden-Mount Holly line.

Track was being laid over creeks and farmland by November, and on December 20, 1869, the C&A started running trains on the newly-laid track between Mount Holly and Medford, while the stations along the line were still being completed. A grand first official run that day featured prominent guests who had travelled by ferry from Philadelphia, and rail to Mount Holly, there to transfer to the new train to Medford. Along the way, locals climbed aboard the train with great excitement. At





Another picture of the Lumberton passenger station. RX was the telegraph call signal. (Photo courtesy of the Burlington County Historical Society)

Branch Street in Medford, the line's southern terminus, they were welcomed and fed by the townspeople at a nearby school. The more prominent officials aboard, including C&A president William H. Gatzmer, were entertained at the home of Dr. Ely, just a short distance away. They then returned to Mount Holly for the trip home.

That is how the line was started. It clearly met a local need for transport, but further examination as to the how and why is of interest. For instance, Ely was a medical doctor in Medford: how did he become involved and what was his motivation? Aside from railroad fever and recognition of need, what really motivated the other incorporators? To answer that, one needs to more closely examine the first board of directors, bearing in mind that once the line was constructed, its operation was immediately leased out to the C&A.

THE CAST OF CHARACTERS

It is safe to observe that the members of the board serving in 1869, as well as others who participated at other times, were among the makers and shakers of the area — wealthy in funds, land, and influence. **James Allen** and **Barclay Haines'** roles have been portrayed, but Ely was the leader of the enterprise, and he seems to have embodied the effort and the community that benefited.

H. P. Ely was a Quaker from Bucks County, Pennsylvania, who attended the University of Pennsylvania's Medical School, graduating and moving in 1834 to Medford, a largely Quaker community. His practice prospered. Ten years later, he married Mary Reeve, a member of a prominent Quaker family whose farm was located in the northern part of Medford that had been in Reeve ownership since the 1700s. In 1844, Ely built for his new bride an impressive home on Main Street in Medford, which stands to this day. Serving local farmers, he undoubtedly knew firsthand the poor condition of the country roads as he went about his visits. He, along with Barclay Haines, Benjamin

Shreve and other farmers and community leaders, had formed the Mount Holly, Lumberton & Medford Turnpike Company in 1854, in an effort to improve what is now part of Burlington County Route 541 between the three towns. The road had been in deplorable muddy condition, and modest tolls would pay for the gravel and maintenance.

Little is recorded about Ely's daily life. He had been a member of and married in the Friends Meeting in Medford, then broke away to join the Quaker Hicksite movement, along with Mary and their farmer friends. Some observers characterize the Quakers as being both socially conscious and wise business people. Available documents show that in the 1850s Ely was supportive of Peter Still, whose brother was James Still, the "Black Doctor of the Pines," a renowned herbalist-healer. By virtue of James' efforts, this self-taught son of former slaves had become the largest landowner in Medford in the mid 1880s, and his descendants to this day celebrate his life and use his former office as a teaching site. Ely attempted to aid Peter Still in freeing his family who were still held as slaves in the South. Quakers in the area had been involved in the abolition movement and had lent support to escaped and freed slaves who gathered in small communities in Burlington County.

The census of 1870 indicated that Ely and his wife owned \$57,000 in property, and had four live-in servants, plus his nephew, Mary's brother, who had joined his practice. His will disclosed that he owned large land holdings in and around Medford.

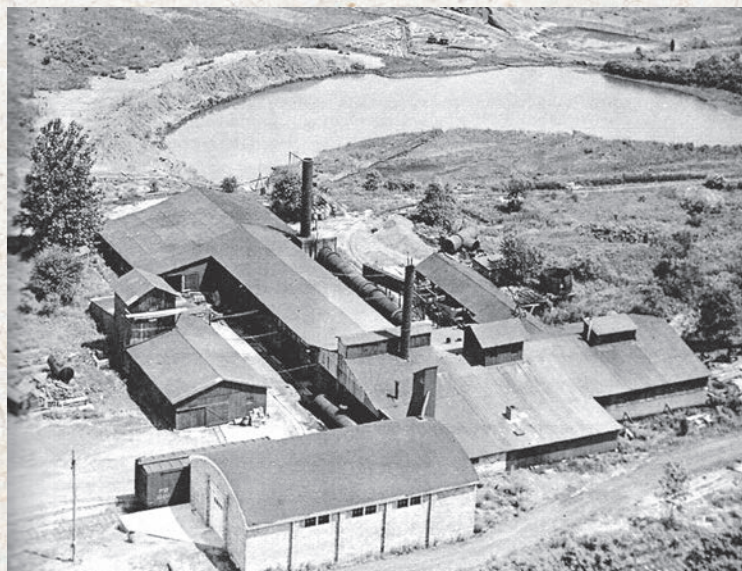
One of the most fascinating aspects of the early maps showing the MLM railroad route is a large spur in upper Medford, on the west side of the north-south, single-track line. It simply begged for explanation, as it seemed to be "in the middle of nowhere." Further examination discloses that it was located on the Reeve family farm and, that as early as 1806, Mary's father, Josiah Reeve, was quoted in an agricultural journal as remarking on

the abilities of marl, which existed under the surface of the farm. It existed as part of a large belt along what eons earlier had been the Jersey seashore. Seen as a great soil rejuvenator, it helped clay and sandy soil alike, possessing potassium, calcium and other trace minerals. While the spur disappeared from maps after around 1915, in 1869 it went directly to the area of the first large marl pit on the Reeve property.

So, while the logical route of the line ran across the property, Mary's family stood to benefit, as the railroad crossed the farm with a spur and station stop, and provided a ready means of shipping its agricultural products as well as marl. Shipping marl had been a major revenue source for the C&A as well as the MLM. Just a month before the line's December 1869 opening, the C&A had sponsored a special train that made stops at various affiliated Central Jersey short lines on which marl pits were located: the Cream Ridge Marl Works in Hornerstown, the Pemberton Marl Company and the Vincentown pits. From just four locations in the region served by the lines, some 100,000 tons of marl were being hauled per year. One official state document indicated that, at the high point of the fertilizer's use, New Jersey was producing nearly a million tons a year, and that the supply underground rivaled the magnitude of the coal deposits in eastern Pennsylvania. Some test borings showed it to be a hundred feet thick.

Dr. Ely himself had purchased two farms on Fostertown Road, across from the Reeve property, where later sand was mined along a tributary of the Rancocas Creek to be used in production of marl on the Reeves property, which had later passed through several corporate hands going into the 20th century.

Alas, shortly after the railroad's opening, the demand for marl started dropping in favor of manufactured fertilizers which were lighter weight and easier to transport and handle. Thus,



Zeolite marl production facility in the 1940s, on the site of the Reeve farm, looking eastward. Note the MLM main line at the lower right, and the box car on the siding on the east side of the line. Originally, marl had been dug on the west side of the line, where a long spur seen on early maps was part of the original 1869 railroad design. Marl pits typically filled with water as the marl was excavated. (Photo courtesy of the author)

within a decade, a major source of the expected revenue for the railroad dropped dramatically.

Notwithstanding, the farmers were now able to ship their produce to market more easily, and to bring in needed raw materials. Small shoe factories, a glass factory, cranberry producers and other rural industries were aided. Coal, and later oil, could be brought in more easily. Workers and visitors could travel, and the rich sand and gravel deposits in the area could be exploited.

The Medford Station of the Philadelphia, Marlton & Medford Railroad. While not built for the Mount Holly, Lumberton & Medford line, it became the southern passenger terminal after the two lines were connected. The original MLM passenger station had suffered heavy damage in a fire and no longer exists. This PMM station remains in use today, modernized as a doctor's office. (Photo courtesy of the Medford Leas Retirement Community)



Henry I. Budd, vice president, was a prominent resident of Mount Holly, a leader in the Burlington County Agricultural Society and owner of the Mount Holly Creamery Company. He eventually became the third president of the MLM. It was reported that he owned land in Lumberton which was sold to the new railroad for the construction of its station.

Isaac W. Stokes, secretary-treasurer, was a friend of Ely and fellow Medford resident. He was a member of a prominent area family and served as Medford Town Clerk. He witnessed Ely's will.

Richardson L. Reeve was Ely's brother-in-law, Mary's brother. Ely had a close relationship with the family. He lived on the Reeve Farm that the railroad traversed.

Benjamin F. Shreve was the director of the Mount Holly National Bank and Union National Bank and came from a prominent area family.

Joseph H. Deacon was a prominent farmer in Lumberton. Little is known of him other than that he obtained a patent to distill liquor from rhubarb in 1869, the year the railroad started.

FOLLOWING THE LINE

Interestingly, the MLM tracks never reached the Mount Holly station itself, but its trains did originate from it. When the east-west line from Camden to Mount Holly had been built, a second Mount Holly station was constructed on Madison Avenue, just south of Washington Street, to serve it. Nearby were a roundhouse, freight facilities, sidings, a water tank, cattle pens and other support facilities. This station was not on the first route coming down from Burlington, although all the

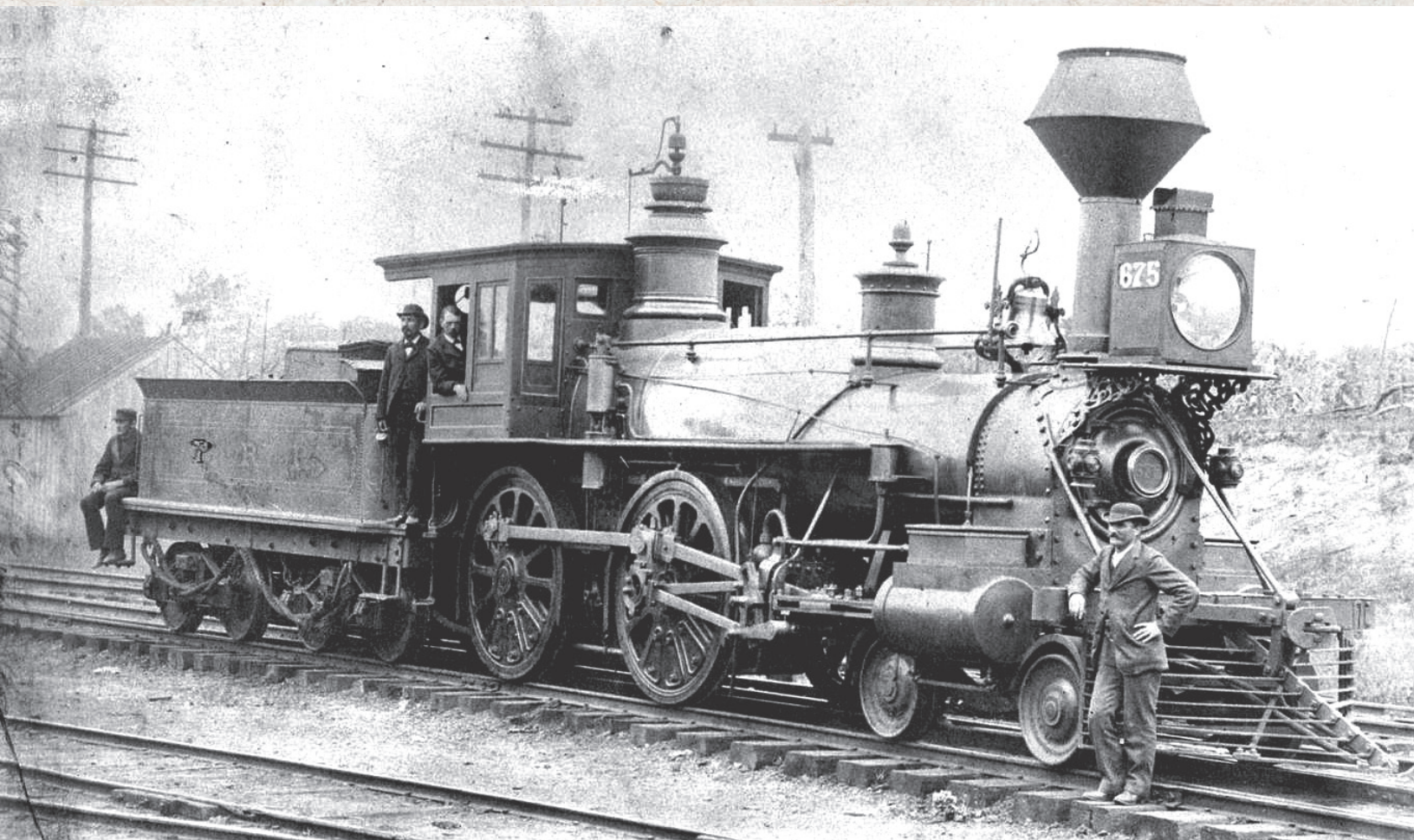
tracks connected in a manner dictated by the fact that Mount Holly land was already occupied by other uses. All three lines came under the operation of the C&A, and then the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1871.

With the bustling small county seat growing, Mount Holly's new station was a busy place. The Madison Hotel, which then stood across the street, was ready to host needy travelers. One writer later recalled old-timers speaking "regretfully of the palmy days of the railroad. More than 50 trains a day stopped at the Mount Holly station in the busy season of the year, and it was a beehive of activity." The Madison Street station still stands, in diminished grandeur and in changed surroundings, with neither rails nor trains. The Grant Street Station was abandoned in 1918, having been bypassed.

MLM trains would originate at the Madison Street station, then less than a mile west would diverge southward on their own rails at a point known as Medford Junction. The connection, at least in later years, was by a wye, adjacent to which were sand mining facilities. Heading south, it crossed what was to later become New Jersey Route 38, with several sidings north of the center of Lumberton. These involved construction and sand operations, and another known as Brown's or Bermico, where a plant manufactured Orangeburg pipe. Smaller sidings apparently came and went on the line over the time of its existence.

As it approached downtown, it traversed what is now the Village Green park, crossed Main Street on a diagonal and then ran behind the buildings on the east side of the street. As it passed behind what was for a time the Lumberton Town Hall,

Pennsylvania Railroad No. 675 operated on the MLM line around 1879. (Photo courtesy of the Lumberton Historical Society, John Jardine)



now the home of the Lumberton Historical Society, it reached the Lumberton Station, which featured separate buildings for freight and passengers, as well as several sidings that were used for coal, marl, sand and other local commerce. Mail was also loaded here for a while.

The tracks then crossed Landing Street, at a location sometimes called Shoe Factory Crossing:

On December 28, 1908, Edgar G. Allen of Vincentown, drove with a horse and buggy to Joseph Britton's, near Lumberton, to a hog killing. When Allen started for home at about two o'clock in the afternoon, he offered a ride to a fellow farmer. At the Lumberton crossing where the accident occurred, the horse balked and they were struck by the train. The horse escaped injury but the wagon was demolished and the occupants thrown a considerable distance, landing in the ditch along the railroad. Allen was taken to the Burlington County Hospital at Mount Holly where he died five or six days after the accident. Following a contentious lawsuit by the widow, a Mount Holly jury awarded the widow \$9,000, which the Pennsylvania Railroad vowed to appeal.

Almost immediately south of Landing Street, the line ran over a wooden trestle later to be replaced with a steel bridge, which still remains. The downtown Lumberton area was subject to periodic flooding from the Rancocas Creek. Most notably a massive storm in September 1940 undercut the trackbed. This section had been periodically raised in an effort to avoid such impacts.

It then crossed several farm roads, passed a major sand-loading siding, and a minor whistlestop at Brown's, a rural farm settlement on Bella Bridge Road, where at various times school children climbed aboard to get to school in Mount Holly, and milk pails were picked up. The next stop was at Reeve's Station, near where the marl pits were located. Then on through land owned by the Wilkins family, with a minor stop at Wilkins Station, after which it crossed the property currently owned by the Medford Leas retirement community, thence over a wooden trestle — earthen following the September 1940 storm — and into Medford, where it ended at Branch Street.

At this southern terminus, there were a small turntable, freight and passenger stations, and a series of sidings, which

served an active industrial services area where coal, lumber, stock, concrete block and other products were handled. Except for the freight station, which was moved several blocks away to Charles Street, all of this is gone now.

In 1881, another set of tracks arrived in Medford on the Philadelphia, Marlton & Medford (PMM) line, a subsidiary of the Camden & Atlantic Railroad. It was built primarily to provide a connection with the Pennsylvania Railroad, which was operating the MLM. The two were then joined with a wye connection north of the original Branch Street terminus, and passenger and freight service were primarily handled at the new stations of the PMM, several blocks away. In 1883, the Pennsylvania Railroad gained control of the Camden & Atlantic, and the trackage of the two came to be known as the Medford Branch. The PMM ceased passenger service in 1927, and its tracks were removed in 1931, with part of its roadbed then being used for the new New Jersey Route 70.

THE SAD DEMISE OF THE MLM

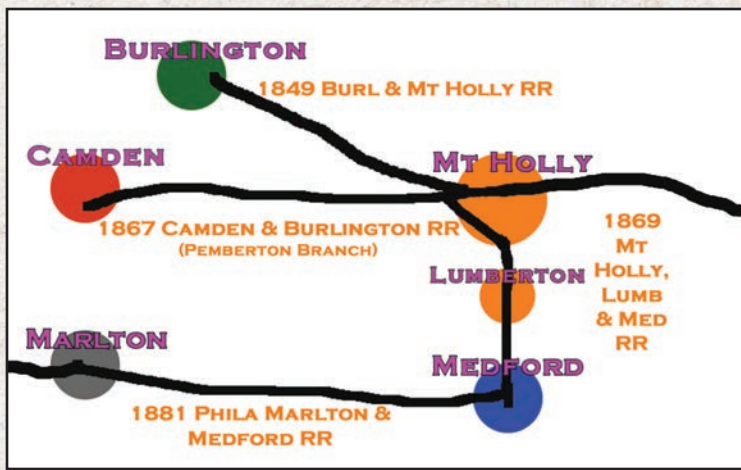
The MLM had ended its passenger service in 1926, as part of a long-term decline. With there no longer being a roundtable at Medford, freight trains typically backed down from Mount Holly, caboose first. While there was some traffic hauling sand and local products and inbound supplies, it dwindled and, after World War II, the track fell into disrepair, with growing derailments.

In fact, the railroad apparently never was a moneymaker, as illustrated by a report filed by the Pennsylvania Railroad as early as 1897. That year, with gross income of \$3,269, the line suffered an operating loss of \$6,659, on top of which it had to pay "rentals" of \$11,189, for a net loss of \$17,848. Even in the brief time the C&A had operated it, farmers had complained of insufficient trains, and the PRR had tried to abandon the line several times.

However, the wise founding fathers of the MLM had written a strong lease, which required annual payments by the lessee to the MLM corporation, regardless of operating profitability, so over time the stockholders of the original corporation did quite well.

Freight run at Lumberton during Penn Central years. Note that given the inability to turn the train at Medford, it was not uncommon for the caboose to not be at the end. (Photo courtesy of the author)





Map, not to scale, shows the chronology of local railroads in the area. (Graphic courtesy of the author)

In 1915, the local MLM corporation lost its identity when the Pennsylvania Railroad, which then owned majority financial control, caused a merger of that line and two others into the new Camden & Burlington County Railway Company, also a PRR subsidiary.

By 1976, Conrail was taking over major elements of the doomed Penn Central corporation, and it obtained approval to abandon the MLM line in the face of three major objectors. Burlington County objected that it would hurt the area economy. The Bermico pipe factory in Lumberton said they would have to close without rail service, which they did, although the section of the track serving them was the last to halt service. In Medford, the Kirby Brothers Feed Store said they'd have to close, but managed to stay in business for some decades after, relying on an altered set of offerings, and on the by-then greatly improved road transportation network.

The last of the tracks were removed in the early 1980s, and this short little line receded into history.

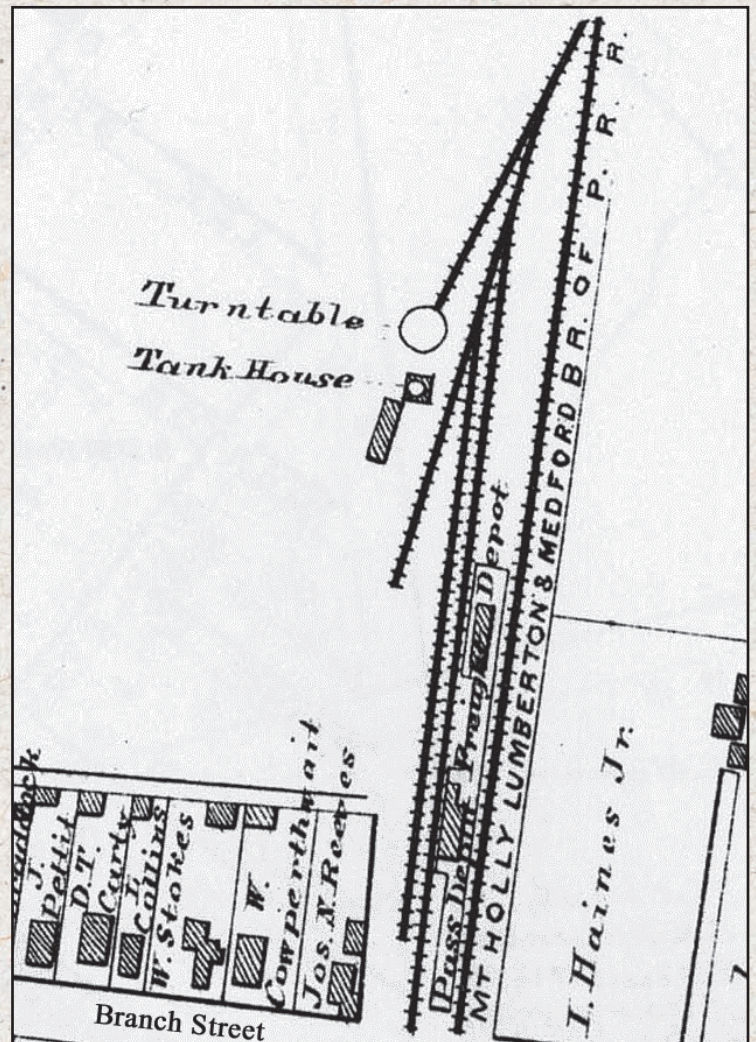
Ely himself died unexpectedly in 1873, barely three years after his railroad began. His succeeding board members passed the following resolution:

Resolved, That in the demise of our late President, Henry P. Ely, we recognize the omnipotence of God; that in the midst of life we are in death, and that we know not when the swift messenger of Death may require our obedience to the demand of the Almighty. Having been harmoniously associated with him for a number of years, in his death we realize the loss of a genial companion, an excellent executive officer and a valuable citizen. In extending our heart-felt sympathies to his surviving relict and numerous family ties, we do so with profound regrets for our irreparable loss, trusting, however that it is his eternal gain.

In fact, it appears that his ambitions had not ended with the building of the railroad. In 1872, the state legislature had enacted two laws: the first authorized the line to be extended southward to Atsion where it was authorized to connect with any railroad that might be at that location, and the second created the Medford Land Improvement Company, no doubt to take advantage of the opening of the area by rail. The former never happened, and there are no available records of the second.

Ely's death was not without interest. Several months later, a local newspaper reported that when Ely had been taken ill, a psychic in Philadelphia had predicted that he would die, and later there were purported communications from the afterlife through the psychic, which were verified by friends as authentic. The morning before his death, fellow board member Barclay Haines and his wife were awakened in the early hours by three loud raps on their bed's headstand, so unusual that their daughter ran down the hall asking what had happened. Haines claimed that this was the first time such a thing had happened, and later felt it was a message of Ely's imminent demise. For decades later, however, the house was known as haunted, with strange swinging of doors and feelings of cold.

1876 Sanborn Insurance map, which shows the southern terminus of the railroad at Branch Street in Medford, with passenger and freight depots, as constructed in 1869. The passenger depot burned and remaining wood was reused in other structures, a common practice at the time. The freight depot was moved several blocks away, no longer being needed after the line was joined with the Philadelphia, Marlton & Medford Railroad in 1881. It still exists in decaying condition. The trackage, turntable and water tank were removed. (Graphic courtesy of the author)



DR. ELY'S LEGACY

So, aside from such mysteries, and the profound sorrow of his colleagues, what was his legacy?

This short little railroad never turned a profit for its operators and gained little attention. Yet, think of what it allowed: coal, lumber, sand, and marl to be hauled; school kids to get to high school in Mount Holly; glass, cranberries, shoes, milk and agricultural products to reach market; and small industries to thrive.

In Lumberton, the bridge over the Rancocas Creek remains, as do several passenger tickets dating back to 1890. Farther south, one relocated milepost, some buried ties, a creek embankment and the original freight station, unrecognizable, now at another location in Medford. The PMM station, now a doctor's office, remains, with a short section of siding nearby. On Branch Street, a Sears & Roebuck home, brought in on freight cars, remains in use. Many of the homes and small industries near the Branch Street terminus would not have existed, and some remain, many repurposed. Ely's mansion on Main Street, now known as Ely Hall, stands as a monument to the man and the achievements of local leaders.

The legacy was perhaps best expressed in J. D. Scott's 1876 *Combination Atlas Map of Burlington County*, a heavily detailed and illustrated recording of the people and times of the area. First, Scott observed that Lumberton had improved with the coming of the railroad. Writing of Medford, he noted: "Much of this rapid growth is due to the building of the railroad to Mount Holly, giving this town an outlet to the great cities...."

Indeed, at a time when transportation was badly in need, Ely and his colleagues helped their beloved region develop and prosper. Not a bad legacy for a Quaker country doctor. 🍌

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The author is pictured here with the last remaining milepost of the old Mount Holly, Lumberton & Medford Railroad. It is cast iron, cast by the Pennsylvania Railroad — which operated the line starting in 1871, until its abandonment in 1976 — in standard form at Altoona. It was found on a farm across which the railroad ran, and relocated some years ago to the nearby Kirby's Mill property by volunteers of the Medford Historical Society. The numbers refer to 5 miles to Mount Holly, and 1 to Medford. The author recently restored it to its present condition.



The remaining bridge over Rancocas Creek at Lumberton. This replaced an earlier wooden trestle. (Photo by the author)

Jim Alexander has researched many railroad subjects, including turntables, water scoops, early railroad radio systems and individual locomotives. He has a special interest in the human, social, and economic aspects of railroads. When he started researching the Mount Holly, Lumberton & Medford Railroad in Burlington County, New Jersey, he soon realized that, while the line itself did not loom large in overall history, it had a major impact on the development of the region. As he dug into the people and forces involved in the line's building, an interesting insight into New Jersey politics and local community dynamics developed. Jim has served as board president for the Friends of the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania, was associate editor of Milepost for a number of years and, for many years, managed both the Museum's website and its evolving computer systems. He was the recipient of the Museum's Spirit of Innovation distinguished service award in 2012.

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