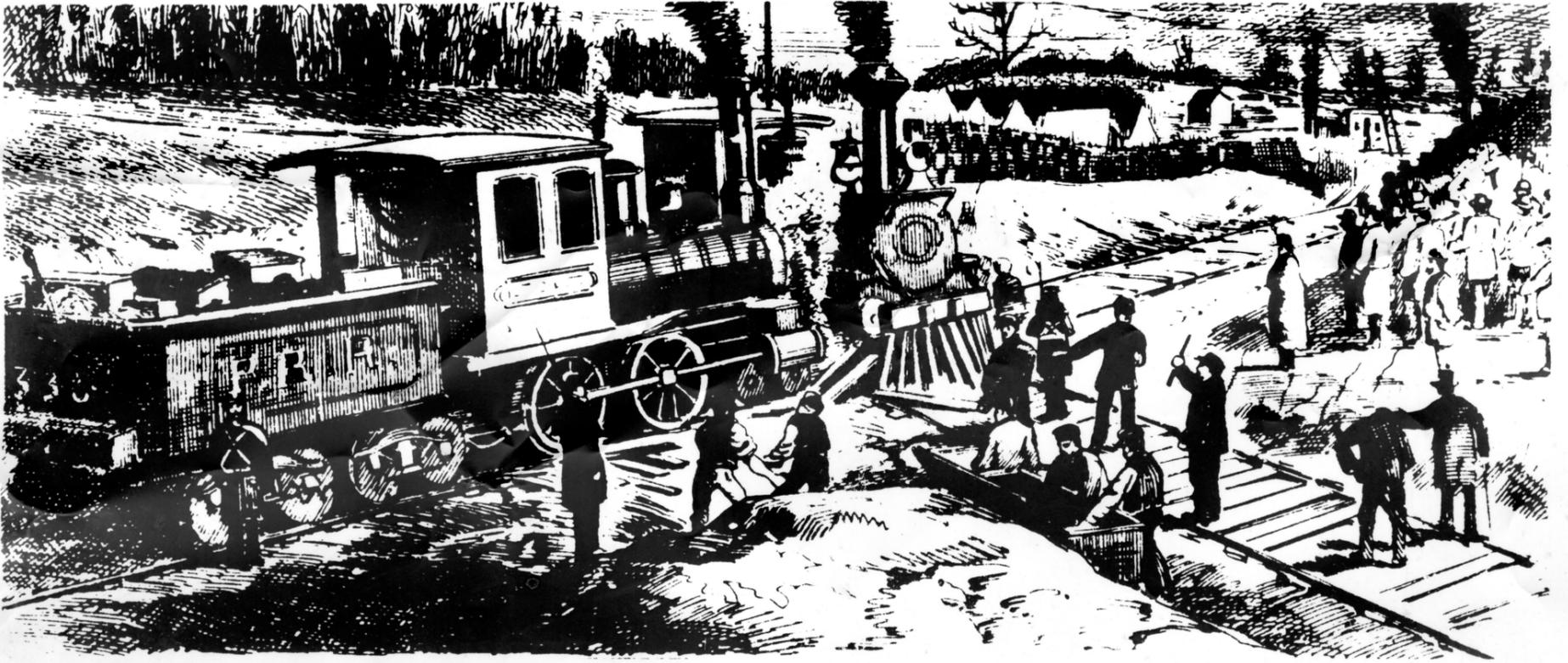


"BATTLE OF THE FROGS" AT MARSHALL'S CORNER BACK IN 1876 CAUSED THE CALLING OUT OF STATE TROOPS AND THREATENED TO DEVELOP INTO A TRAGEDY UNTIL COURT'S DECISION SETTLED IT



(Sketches reprinted from the "New York Graphic" of January 10, 1876)

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SKETCH OF THE BARRICADE OF LOCOMOTIVES AT MARSHALL'S CORNER

Marshall's Corner is a hamlet of a store, post office and half a dozen houses on the main-traveled road from Trenton and Pennington to Hopewell and about equi-distant from the two latter-named places. As one approaches it from Trenton, he sees on the left, across a narrow valley, a long line of embankment, seamed by water erosion, in places treeshaded, and on which, perhaps, a herd of sleek cows is peacefully grazing. This is the old bed of the Mercer and Somerset Railroad, one of the historic roads of the country, famed for its "Battle of the Frogs," in which two great rival corporations locked horns and were only separated by the combined power of the courts and the state militia.

It seems a long way off, in these days of trolleys, motor cars and aeroplanes, but it was only in 1876 that it happened, and there are men now living who remember the incident perfectly. The line ran, or rather meandered, from Somerset on the old Belvidere Road — now the Delaware Valley line — up the beautiful valley of Jacob's Creek to Pennington, thence along a babbling brook, through the lovely Hopewell valley to Millstone, on the Raritan, where passengers crossed the stream and took another branch to New Brunswick — on the main line to New York — and that was the only way in 1876 for the dwellers along the road to reach the metropolis.

The stone road to Flemington, through Woodville and Ringoes, leaves the Hopewell road at Marshall's Corner, and a hundred yards or so beyond crosses the bed of the old road. One can see its deep cut on the right. On the left, out in the field, is a very interesting structure, the old station for Marshall's Corner, with long, overhanging eaves and platform, after the fashion of country stations of that day — the only one left along the whole line so far as it has been possible to discover. An old and intelligent resident of the neighborhood remembered the road and the battle perfectly and was willing to talk of it, although not wishing his name to appear.

ORIGIN OF THE BATTLE

"We had suffered so long from the tyranny of Camden and Amboy, and later of the Pennsylvania systems," he said, "that when Squire Knight, of Trenton, with other local and Philadelphia capitalists, projected the Delaware and Bound Brook, we were with them heart and soul. The line was to run from Jenkintown, Pa., on the North Penn Railroad — which had a line into Philadelphia — to Bound Brook on the Jersey Central, which would give a direct line to New York and destroy the Pennsylvania's roundabout monopoly. The Pennsylvania was, of course, against them and the liveliest kind of a fight developed. They didn't come to blows, though, till the Bound Brook engineers laid out their crossing over the Pennsylvania's track, a short distance south of Hopewell village.

"The first thing we knew the 'Pennsy' had its biggest engine — No. 679 — I can see the figures on her now after 40 years — standing on its track just where the B.B. was to cross



RUINS OF OLD MARSHALL'S CORNER STATION

it, and it was evident to the veriest tyro that they meant to contest the crossing. But the B.B. men, under Squire Knight, were equal to the occasion. Three months ran along and the Bound Brook road was about ready to lay its rails across the rival road. The 'Pennsy' was a single track and every time a train came along, which wasn't often, the guarding engine had to run off on a siding and let the regular go by, immediately after which it would resume its position.

"Then came a bitter cold Wednesday night, January the fifth it was, at 7:30, when the regular train was due. The guard engine went onto the siding as she had done for three months before, when suddenly and silently an army of 200 stout employees of the B.B. rose from ambush nearby, rushed upon the guard engine, barricaded the tracks before and behind it with ties and other timber, and proceeded to tie their captive with heavy chains to the tracks. Then they barricaded the main track above and below the crossing in a similar manner, tore up the rails and ties and proceeded to lay their heavy frogs for the crossing.

RAMMED THE BARRACKS

"News of the incident was, of course, sent at once to Superintendent Jackson, of the Pennsylvania, at Jersey City and after he had blown off steam for a minute, as men will on such occasions, he wired Engineer George Ellis, at Millstone, to get out No. 336 and to put all steam and to ram their barricade at full speed and scatter it to the devil. I know, because Ellis later showed me the telegram, and No. 336 was one of their largest engines. Ellis proved the man for the emergency. It's 11 miles from Millstone to Hopewell and he made it in 15 minutes. We around the scene of operations — and a crowd of 500 had gathered by this time — heard a dull rumble down the valley toward Millstone that increased to a roar, and then a fiery thing, vomiting smoke and flame, dashed into view and made for the crossing. Not one of us thought she would take the barricade, and we made no effort to get away, but take it she did and at full speed. I never saw such a scene in my life. First there was a crash, and then ties, rails, timber, tools, lanterns and

what not went flying in all directions like sky rockets on Fourth of July nights.

"The wonder is there wasn't a dozen killed, but nobody was hurt, at least so as to require attention. Even Ellis escaped with some slight bruises, while No. 336, sinking into the soft earth, was put to rights in the repair shop in a day. Two other engines were sent down by the Pennsylvania people to hold the fort, but the Bound Brook officials were ready for them, and seized and held all three while an engine of their own was placed on the completed frog.

"News of what was going on had spread meantime throughout the countryside, and by morning nearly fifteen hundred people had gathered, many of them armed, especially the farmers, with squirrel rifles, smooth bore muskets, and some with the old King's Arm flintlock of the revolution. Public feeling against the Pennsylvania was high, as I have said, and many threats were uttered against the officials thereof. Counsel of the Pennsylvania arrived from Newark on the 6th at 11 o'clock with an injunction restraining the Delaware and Bound Brook Railroad from meddling with the 'Pennsy's' property until the Chancellor could hear and decide the case. This added fuel to the flames, and such was the tension that at 1 p.m. Sheriff Mount telegraphed Governor Bedle for troops. Four of the Trenton companies, A, B, D and G, were at once ordered under arms, (the alarm to rally being sounded by the City Hall bell), and one company from Lambertville — the whole under command of Col. Angell of the Seventh Regiment.

COURT SETTLED BATTLE

"The troops arrived on the scene soon after 6 the next morning, while it was still dark, and soon their campfires lit the skies while groups gathered around them and proceeded with the morning meal. The three locomotives and armies of employees and spectators formed a sombre background. Armed guards were quickly placed around the scene of combat and the excitement to a great extent subsided. Then at 1 o'clock the same day news came that the Chancellor had decided that the Delaware and Bound Brook road should lay and maintain its frogs, which

ended the "Battle of the Frogs". But it made a great stir while it lasted. Reporters swarmed like bees around a molasses cask. The New York Daily Graphic had a front page cartoon on it, and a whole page of illustrations by its special artist. The New York and Philadelphia dailies were also well represented."

"And when the Delaware and Bound Brook was opened, the Mercer and Somerset went out of business?" we queried.

"In time it did. The ties and rails were taken up and the station sold. The long one at Hopewell is now two or three tenements. This here is the only one left on the line. I think, and there is only part of that. Mr. Runkle, across the way there, has part of it in his chicken house."

"Who owns the land it stands on?"

"Why, the Pennsylvania, of course. That corporation never sells any of its land."

"But that portion of the old roadbed from Somerset to the Washington Crossing and Pennington stone road is a public highway."

"Yes, but the freeholders only lease it. You'll find that the Pennsylvania still retains ownership."

The point where the historic battle occurred may be readily identified. It is about half a mile south of the present Hopewell station, a few yards north of the third overhead bridge from it. Two large oil tanks nearby will serve further to identify it. When the row began the Pennsylvania went to the New Jersey Legislature and had a law passed that no railroad should cross another at grade except at a certain angle, which was nearly a right angle, and as the Bound Brook ran nearly parallel to its rival it had to swing around a wide circle in order to cross at the required angle. The cut for this is still plainly perceivable, although as soon as its competitor gave up the ghost the Bound Brook proceeded to straighten its tracks by re-laying them in their present position.

In Hopewell the Times-Advertiser writer found several gentlemen who remembered the historic struggle, including Col. Stout and Charles Blackwell. From the latter he was so fortunate as to secure a copy of the Daily Graphic referred to by his informant. It is of date, January, 1876, and the cartoon on its first page represents a monster frog sitting where two railroads cross with this caption beneath:

"This is the frog that Chancellor Runyon orders must be maintained at the Hopewell Railroad crossing if it takes the whole army and navy of New Jersey to do it."

The entire fourth page is devoted to a map of the spot and to sketches by its special artist of tragic and dramatic scenes "touching on and appertaining to" the subject. One is a portrait of a huge country man whom it styles "Leonidas," but who was really Edward Van Dyke, the local celebrity, and a leader of the Bound Brook forces in their charge on the switch and capture of the engine.