

Western Pennsylvania: Past Journeys – Future Ventures



Guest Editor

Donald P. Fusilli, Jr., P.E., JD
President and CEO, Michael Baker Corporation

“Left Pittsburgh this day at 11 ock with a party of 11 hands 7 of which are soldiers, a pilot and three young men on trial they having proposed to go with me throughout the voyage.”

This is the first journal entry of Meriwether Lewis as he and William Clark embarked on their historic journey in 1803, to the mostly unknown, western territories of a then fledgling nation. Western Pennsylvania and, in particular, Pittsburgh, immediately became known as the “Gateway to the West.” The relevance of Western Pennsylvania to the past, present, and future of transportation has never been more significant.

Clearly, our region is unique in its transportation infrastructure. It has been forced over the course of time, through a series of social evolutions and industrial revolutions, to continually change — and to continually improve. That change and improvement is not restricted to conventional modes of transportation, as today we must concern ourselves with transportation of information, as well as whole populations. Pittsburgh has adapted quickly and is now recognized as a critical hub in the emerging “information highway.”

Even before Lewis and Clark’s famous trek, Pittsburgh was an integral “hub” of all modes of trans-

portation of the time. Horse and wagon trails led from Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore, and other points east, directly to Pittsburgh. Our waterways have served as critical links for trade, commerce, and industry for well over two centuries. Many may be unaware that Pittsburgh, because of its renown in the mid-1800s as a transportation hub, became a natural stop along the “Underground Railroad,” the system that helped transport people fleeing slavery to points north from the South. Since then, Pittsburgh has become better known as the “City of Bridges,” second only to Venice, Italy, in that regard. Much has been documented on the extent of Pittsburgh’s bridges, but their relevance to social and economic growth can never be over-emphasized. The expansive trolley system of the late-19th century, although a patchwork conglomeration of several operators, eventually became consolidated and served Pittsburgh well for many, many years after. In fact, The Pittsburgh Railways Corporation, in 1901, operated nearly 400 miles of single track, carried nearly 180 million passengers a year, and achieved milestone revenues of nearly \$7 million — not bad for a transportation startup destined for an eventual demise in the mid-1950s. Western Pennsylvania and Pittsburgh have long served as a

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critical hub of aviation transportation and is also location to many aviation firsts and discoveries including Samuel Pierpont Langley’s landmark experimentations with aerodynamics at, what is today, the University of Pittsburgh. Merle Moltrup, a Beaver Falls native, who in 1927, was the first Air Mail Carrier to make a mail service delivery from Pittsburgh to Cleveland. But, one only need consider the impact on the area from the world-class, award-winning Pittsburgh International Airport to understand the importance of aviation to the region.

It is my pleasure and honor to present stories from the past and solutions to the future transportation needs of the Western Pennsylvania region in this important issue of *Pittsburgh Engineer*. One cannot make commentary on transportation in Pittsburgh, without mentioning the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the long-standing relationship they’ve developed with both the region and the City of Pittsburgh. In this issue, we highlight the Corps and the Port of Pittsburgh; we examine how Western Pennsylvania must continue to focus its social and economic growth by aligning those efforts with advancements in all modes of transportation that service this vital region; we expand our knowledge of Pittsburgh’s airports and local air transportation systems; we feature

a complete Centerfold Transportation Timeline, provided by Engineering Society of Western Pennsylvania; we explore the long and valued history of Pittsburgh’s incline, trolley, and transit systems; we gain a deeper understanding of the whys, hows, and whos of Pittsburgh’s bridges and tunnels; we learn of the historical significance of both Pennsylvania’s Turnpike system and The Horseshoe Curve Railway in Altoona, Pa.; we hear from recognized experts on all of these modes of transportation, and more. And finally, we examine how our transportation past has impacted our present, and how our efforts in improving transportation today will lead us into tomorrow.

Again, it has been both my pleasure and honor to be asked to serve as guest editor for this issue of *Pittsburgh Engineer*. As someone with a deep historical interest and one that believes that history helps shape our future, I embrace the valuable content of the articles presented here. Our transportation challenges are before us, but we face them with a healthy progression from the past. If happening for the first time all over again, there is little doubt that Lewis and Clark would change many things regarding their epic challenge of exploring the West. One thing they most certainly would not change — beginning in Pittsburgh.