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Sea-Going Railroader

Archie Pharo Tells of the Days When You Didn't Know
Whether You Had a Railroad or Not

by Elias S. Longstreet

Scrambling from a welter of hot coals and live steam, Archie Pharo gained the top of a squishy hummock and from there surveyed poor old No. 2 as she wallowed in the mire, for all the world like a human being enmeshed in quicksand, "Well, I'll be darned," was Archie's heartfelt, if not eloquent comment upon the disaster which had sent his beloved locomotive in a nose dive from the rails into the salt marshes.

"I oughta have knowed better," said Archie recently in narrating some of the incidents which accompanied some of his early railroading on the Jersey sands. "I was kind of suspicious of that spot. I thought it might be soft and undermined. So I stopped old No. 2, bless her soul, and I sent my baggagemaster, Sam Marshall, out to investigate.

"He wasn't much bigger than a Barnegat mosquito, weighing only 95 pounds. Well, he got out there and jumped up and down on the ties and they didn't budge. Come on," he yelled. "It's all right." Then I gave her the steam, slow like. But there was a big difference between Sam's 95 pounds and old No. 2's 40 tons. All at once the rails began to sink and before I hardly knew what it was all about poor old No. 2 was thrashing about on her side like a wounded duck.

"I was kinda excited and I crawled out as quick as scat. I didn't feel hurt but I didn't know but what I had one of those injuries that don't knock a man over until some time later. But I didn't have a scratch. I felt sorry for that old engine of mine, she looked so darn human somehow, all messed up in that old bog. We got her out later, tho. And fixed her up as good as new, but do you know I think she remembered, for every time we passed that spot she kinda hesitated and shivered.

Recently THE PRESS carried a historical resume of the building of the railways, which traverse the shore section of Ocean County, the Tuckerton line in particular, but it was left to those two old timers, Archie Pharo, 74, engineer, and George Willis, conductor, who will be 84 in September, to tell of the human effort, the sweat and brawn and energy, which went into the carving out the right of way, laying the roadbed and operating the old wood-burners that dolorously puffed their way through the solitudes of a sparsely settled seashore and countryside. Both served the Tuckerton line approximately the same length of time, 54 years, and are now retired on pensions, occupying two of those neat, tidy cottages for which Tuckerton is noted.

Pottering around his paint pots and other spring-rejuvenation materials in his little barn, Archie's eyes brightened beneath his snowy thatch as he recalled pioneer days. "Let's see now," he pondered, "I guess I know what you want. There's a fellow on the radio and he talks about, let me see now – Oh yes, he tells "the human side of the news." Sure, that would be what you want.

"But I dunno that an old feller like me has done anything worth printing. Of course the town was all excited when the news came that the railroad was coming. There was lots

of whooping, hats were thrown into the air and maybe some of the fellers got tight. But I don't remember much of that for I was a boy of 11 or 12 then.

"Then things got going, the underbrush was hacked down, roadbed made and tracks laid. Theophilus Price has told you of that famous trial trip when the road was completed as far as West Creek. It was a bigger thing than if the circus had struck town. Everybody who could crowd upon the seats on the three flat cars was there, the girls looking their prettiest.

"Then that contrary old wood burner just showered them with soot and sparks when it started up. But there was no stopping and when West Creek was reached you never saw such a sight. The girls dresses were full of holes like they now burn with their cigarets and nearly everybody was blistered. There was a lot of mosquitoes, too, to help things out. That was the costliest free ride Tuckerton people ever got.

"A FELLER named Bill Day brought the first engine down here. Frank or "Reddy" Maulsbury fired for him. You don't see engines like that nowadays except in museums. She was called no. 2 and had a sort of funnel-like stack, five feet across at the top. No. 1 had what was called a 'cabbage top,' a straight stack with a sort of bulge like a bulb on the end. Inside was a screen spreader to scatter the sparks and on top was finer screen to catch the sparks.

"But it didn't always catch them. Sometimes there'd be a hole and out they'd fly, sometimes chunks almost as long as your hand. Every once in awhile we'd set the woods afire and there was the dickens to pay. Many's the time we've stopped on the way back and helped fight the fires.

"For a passenger train we'd wood-up here at Tuckerton and then for a light train we'd have to fire her every eight miles. For a heavy freight we'd wood-up twice and fire her every three or four miles. They had fire boxes four feet long and we used hunks of pine wood cut in two-foot lengths. When the engines came I was a kid of 12 and I was cracked and crazy to become an engineer. I meant it too and as soon as I could I got a job on the railroad. Then I worked up to fireman and at last I got my fist on that old throttle and I was a proud youngster! We've never had any real bad accidents. Of course we've had upsets and we've run off the track but never anything serious.

I REMEMBER the time, tho, when I hit a steer on the run from Barnegat to Manahawkin. Lickity split, we went into him and darned if he didn't get under the wheels and stay there while we bumped along on the ties, tearing up yards and yards of track, expecting every minute to be our last. Why we didn't upset I don't know, but we tore up 240 feet of track and they had to replace 178 ties. I remember the number to the dot. And would you believe it, every bone in that critter's body was broken, but there was nary a cut in his hide.

I helped to build the Long Beach road, you know, the branch that comes in from Manahawkin to Ship Bottom and then goes on down to Beach Haven. There used to be another branch north to Barnegat City but that's gone now. Those were the days when you didn't know whether you had a railroad or whether you didn't. Long Beach is an island, you know, and not a very high one at that even now and lower yet then.

"You'd lay a lot of track one day and go back the next with maybe a northeaster blowing, and your track would be gone. One day I took old No. 2 out with the construction train and gang. George Willis was the conductor. It was blowing great guns and when we went across the Barnegat Bay and marshes it was like being in a ship at sea. The old engine rocked and wallowed like a sailboat and I expected every moment she'd dive head foremost into the bay

"I thought maybe I'd jump if worst came to worst. But the trouble was I was on the wrong side of the engine and like enough she'd have squashed me. When we got over to Ship Bottom we found the wind and waves was just about tearing everything loose. Seas were sweeping way up on the beach or across into Barnegat Bay and the sand was flying hard enough to cut your cheeks.

"But I stuck old No. 2's nose into the teeth of it and opened the throttle. She groaned and wheezed and started ahead, but we didn't get far for I saw 150 or more of our railroad, ties and all, washed against the telegraph poles along the right of way, and where the track had been the sea was pouring across into the bay. That ended our work for a day or two. Now I'd say that was constructing a railroad under difficulties. It sure was a seagoing railroad.

"AND even when we didn't have the water to contend with, we were often bothered with sand. The wind would blow great slathers of it across the tracks and we'd have to get out and shovel our way, just as we often had to shovel snow in winter blizzards. There was no such thing as snow-plows then.

"Sometimes we'd get to the other end of the island and then find the ocean had washed out the tracks back of us. Then we'd have to spend the night out there in the wilderness, freezing if it was winter time and bitten to death by mosquitoes and greenflies if it was summer, but hungry whether it was winter or summer, for we never carried food enough to tide us over such emergencies.

"One day near Loveladies – now there's a nice name for you – No. 2 played another trick on me, just curled up, turned over and played dead. Funny thing about that, the tender left the track first and seemed to creep right up on the engine and yank it off the rails. There had been a washout and the tracks were blocked up but a high tide had washed out some of the supporting pieces.

"We couldn't see the damage that had been done, but as we passed over the rails one side dipped down and the tender left the track, whipped around and pulled us over too. We capsized easy and nice like right into a salt pond. I never even left my seat, didn't have a chance to. Then I climbed out and surveyed the state of affairs. The engine was on a sort of slant and blessed if I couldn't look right down the poor thing's smoke stack. She was a mess but we got her out and fixed her up all right.

"Before we built that Long Beach line they used to take passengers across the bay by steamer, the old Barkley. She carried about 100 and ran from Edge Cove, near Tuckerton, to Beach Haven. The railroad put her out of business tho.

"YOU'D never believe it now, but in those days they used to raise a lot of cattle along the shore hereabouts and they were a darned nuisance on the island when we were building the line and afterward too.

"There was one herd of about 40 that we had to keep shooing off the rails all the time. They just seemed to take a pesky delight in standing there and defying us. They belonged to Capt. Ike Jennings, who ran the Harvey Cedars hotel. Captain Ike was on the train one day when I had to stop three times for his darned cows.

"Says he to me later, 'Them cows are a darned nuisance, ain't they Archie?' 'You're dad burned right they are, captain, says I. 'Well,' he opined, 'I don't know what to do about them. They were here before the railroad, there's no way to fence them in and I can't get rid of them. Why don't you run over them?'

"'No sir,' says I, 'I've got a heart in my bosom. I wouldn't kill the critters. Besides, I might wreck the train and kill myself and, anyhow, you'd have a suit for damage against us.' But I wouldn't have run over them for any amount of money. Why I've even stopped the train for dogs, ducks, geese and turkeys. No sir, I was no killer.

"But to get back to the captain's cows. He listened to me and then he piped up. 'Archie, you like milk?'

" 'Of course I do.'

" 'Well I'll tell you what. You come up and pick out the finest cow in my herd. You can have her for nothing.'

"'I don't want her,' I protested.

" 'Now don't be bashful and backward. You come along up and get her and you'll have all the milk you want then and it won't cost you a cent.'

" 'I'll be darned if I do,' I shouted. 'I don't want the cussed cow. It's bad enough to have to shoo them off the track, let alone going home at night to milk the darned things and take care of them.'

"He seemed kinda disappointed at that but said no more. Then one day I pulled into Manahawkin and there stood Henry Ellison with a rope in his hand and at the other end of the rope was a fine cow. I didn't know what was up but I kinda thought I was in for something.

" 'Hello Archie,' said Henry as I hopped down from the cab. 'Where do you want her?'

"'Want who?'

" 'Why this here cow,' he grinned.

" 'I don't want no part of her,' I yelled. 'I don't want a cow and I'll be darned if I'll take one.'

" 'Captain Ike said he thought you might feel that way about her,' said Henry, mild like. 'But he told me if you didn't take her to tie her onto the tail end of your freight train.' And he proceeded to make her fast.

"The upshot of the whole thing was that I had to take the blamed critter. I loaded her on and then when I got her home to Tuckerton I had to build a stable for her, buy her food and milk her. I'd wrestle all day with No. 2 and then I'd come home and play nursemaid to that cussed cow. I got all the milk I and the neighbor's could drink and had almost enough left over to bathe in.

"It went along that way for about a year, Captain Ike kidding me about my herd and was I getting much milk. Then one day I met him and said:

" 'Captain Ike, do you like milk?'

" 'What a question. Of course I do.'

" 'Then,' said I, 'You trot right down and pick out the best cow I've got. She's yours for nothing.

"He grinned and allowed that he had cows enough. 'But I tell you what,' he suggested, 'you sell her and keep the money. And when she's gone come up and pick another out of my herd.'

" 'I'll sell her all right, if I can,' I agreed, 'but I'll be darned if I ever take another and don't you dare tie another to the end of my train either.'

"I sold her for \$40 after a time, but I never got another. A steam engine is bad enough to take care of, let alone a cow."

BESIDES helping to build the Long Beach line, Archie can also lay claim to having a part in building the Tuckerton main line. The laying out of the right of way was contracted for by the mile. Archie's father, Albert, bargained to do the second and third mile beyond Tuckerton and Archie, a lad, drove a team of horses for his dad.

"My uncle, Archelaus Pharo, was also one of the organizers of the line. Yep, that Archelaus Pharo whose stone you see down there in the old graveyard on the banks of the creek was he. I'd a had the same name too only my mother didn't like it and compromised by naming me Archie.

"One of the biggest jobs the old Tuckerton line had to do was to haul around Barclay Haines, one of the early promoters. He was a Quaker and a mountain of a man, weighing 365 pounds. He was a keen Bible student.

"Yep, I've lived all my life here in Tuckerton. It's a fine old place and a historical place too. Lots of things happened here during the Revolution. Before that the Indians roamed all over here in the summertime, coming down from inland mostly, I understand, from Burlington County.

"They must have been mighty fond of shell food, drying a lot of it in the sun for food during the winter.

There used to be great shell heaps around here and I guess there's still one or two along the bay shore.

"This whole section has seen a big change since my early railroading days. Old faces

have gone and new ones have come. Captain Ike and his cows are things of the past. Now cottages are springing up on Long Beach Island like mushrooms. Soon there will be one continuous town from Ship Bottom to Beach Haven and later on up to Barnegat City.

"I don't know what they'll do for transportation if the old Tuckerton line passes out. Have to rely on auto buses I suppose. But as for me, give me the old locomotive any time, even if they did turn upside down with me once in a while.