

BESSEMER AND LAKE ERIE RAILROAD, GREENVILLE SHOPS
(Canadian National Railway)
86 Ohl Street
Greenville
Mercer County
Pennsylvania

HAER PA-642
PA-642

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

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HAER No. PA-642

LOCATION: 86 Ohl Street, Greenville, Mercer County, Pennsylvania. The Greenville Shops are located at latitude 41.3986, longitude -80.3872. The coordinate represents the center of the turntable. This coordinate was obtained on 10 December 2008 by plotting its location on the Greenville West, PA USGS Digital Raster Graphic in ESRI ArcGIS 9.2. The accuracy of the coordinates is +/- 12 meters. The coordinate datum is North American Datum 1927 CONUS.

DATES OF CONSTRUCTION: 1893 – 1951

**ARCHITECT/
ENGINEER:** Pittsburgh, Shenango and Lake Erie Railroad; Bessemer and Lake Erie Railroad

PRESENT OWNERS: Canadian National Railway

SIGNIFICANCE: This shop complex was built for the maintenance of the Bessemer and Lake Erie Railroad's locomotives and cars, with initial construction in 1893. It was the main running maintenance and heavy repair facility for the railroad. Subsequent additions enlarged the complex through 1951. The surviving structures reflect the industrial architectural heritage of the region. The Erecting Shop is one of the finer surviving industrial buildings in Northwestern Pennsylvania. The Roundhouse is an excellent example of a once common, but increasingly rare structure uniquely associated with railroads, and the turntable is still in service.

DESCRIPTION: The shop complex consists of seven major buildings, of which four were photographed for this documentation project. The 26-bay, brick Erecting Shop was used for heavy repair of steam and, later, diesel-electric locomotives. A Diesel Shop extension was added to the south face of bays 25 and 26 at the Erecting Shop's east end in 1951, specifically to perform running maintenance on diesel-electric locomotives. The northern half of the Erecting Shop, which has a lower roofline, housed the machine shop. A transfer table along the building's south side moved locomotives to and from the Erecting Shop bays. The higher roofline in this portion accommodates 240-ton-capacity bridge cranes for lifting major components and complete locomotives. Both portions of this building feature pitched roofs with clerestories.

Southeast of the Erecting Shop is the 17-stall Roundhouse, which was built to house running maintenance of steam locomotives, though it later served diesels as well. It is brick, with concrete interior columns, though a large portion of the walls and stall doors are steel-framed, multi-pane windows to admit natural light. It also has a windowed clerestory. An electrically driven turntable serviced all 17 stalls, and still serves to turn diesel locomotives.

The brick Powerhouse located south of the west end of the Erecting Shop supplied the entire complex with electric power of the correct voltage for machinery on the site. Farther south are the Wheel Shop, which maintained wheels, axles, and bearings for the system, and a large, partially open Freight Car Shop. This served as the railroad's heavy car repair shop. Visible in one photograph is a portion of the Passenger Car Shop, used to maintain those cars as long as the railroad operated passenger trains (until March 1955). Other ancillary buildings not specifically identified are visible in some of the photographs.

HISTORY:

Andrew Carnegie established the Pittsburgh, Bessemer and Lake Erie Railroad Company in 1897 to carry iron ore from Conneaut, Ohio, on Lake Erie to Carnegie Steel Company plants in and around Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The official southern terminus of the PB&LE was a yard in North Bessemer, where it met the Union Railroad, another company line which connected to Carnegie steel mills in the Monongahela Valley. Forming a link between his plants and the Great Lakes ore boats arriving in Conneaut from Minnesota's Missabe Iron Range, it was part of Carnegie's plan to form a complete, vertically integrated steel company. The core of the PB&LE was formed by two small lines Carnegie absorbed: the Pittsburgh, Shenango and Lake Erie Railroad, and the Butler and Pittsburgh Railroad. The company was renamed the Bessemer and Lake Erie Railroad in 1900. Carnegie Steel had an exclusive 999 year lease to the B&LE. This lease was acquired by United States Steel when that company acquired Carnegie Steel in 1901. The Bessemer and Lake Erie Railroad became part of Transtar, Inc., in 1988, and subsequently a part of Great Lakes Transportation, LLC, in 2001. Since 2004, the former Bessemer and Lake Erie has been operated as the Bessemer Subdivision of the Canadian National Railway. Iron ore remains the route's major freight commodity, although coal has always been a convenient backhaul from North Bessemer to Conneaut.

The Pittsburgh, Shenango and Lake Erie Railroad began construction of the Greenville, Pennsylvania, shops on 5 acres of donated land in 1893. The largest portion of the complex was added ca. 1901 by successor

Bessemer and Lake Erie on another 51.44 donated acres. The last major structure to be added was the Diesel Shop in 1951. Many of the steam-era facilities gradually fell into disuse after the road completely dieselized, but portions continued to house various support functions. The complex is largely redundant to Canadian National, and much of it has been abandoned in place since the CN acquired the B&LE. The turntable still sees service turning diesel locomotives when needed.

The shop complex is located beside the Pittsburgh, Shenango and Lake Erie Railroad's original main line, which largely followed the Little Shenango and Shenango rivers between the villages of Osgood, north of Greenville, and Kremis to the south. Since this route involved steep grades out of Greenville in both directions, the Bessemer and Lake Erie built a new line between Osgood and Kremis in 1902 that bypassed Greenville and these grades and shortened the run by three miles. The original line, known as the "Old Line" or "Low Line," remains in place to reach the shops and Shenango Yard, where the CN interchanges freight traffic with Norfolk Southern Railway and CSX Transportation.

HISTORIAN: J. Lawrence Lee, Ph.D., P.E.

SOURCES: Roy C. Beaver, *The Bessemer and Lake Erie Railroad, 1869-1969*, San Marino, CA: Golden West Books, 1969.

Robert Lorenzo and Nathan S. Clark, Jr., *Bessemer and Lake Erie in Color*, Kutztown, PA: Morning Sun Books, 1994.

PROJECT
INFORMATION:

The Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) photo-documented the site in 2006 at the request of Nathan S. Clark, Jr. This project was conducted under the general direction of Richard O'Connor, Chief, Historic Documentation Programs (HDP). Christopher Marston, HAER Architect, coordinated the project, with the assistance of J. Lawrence Lee, HAER Engineer-Historian. Jet Lowe, HAER Photographer, produced the large format photographs.

RELATED

DOCUMENTATION: College Avenue Bridge, HAER PA-83

Bessemer & Lake Erie Railroad, Allegheny River Bridge,
HAER No. PA-508

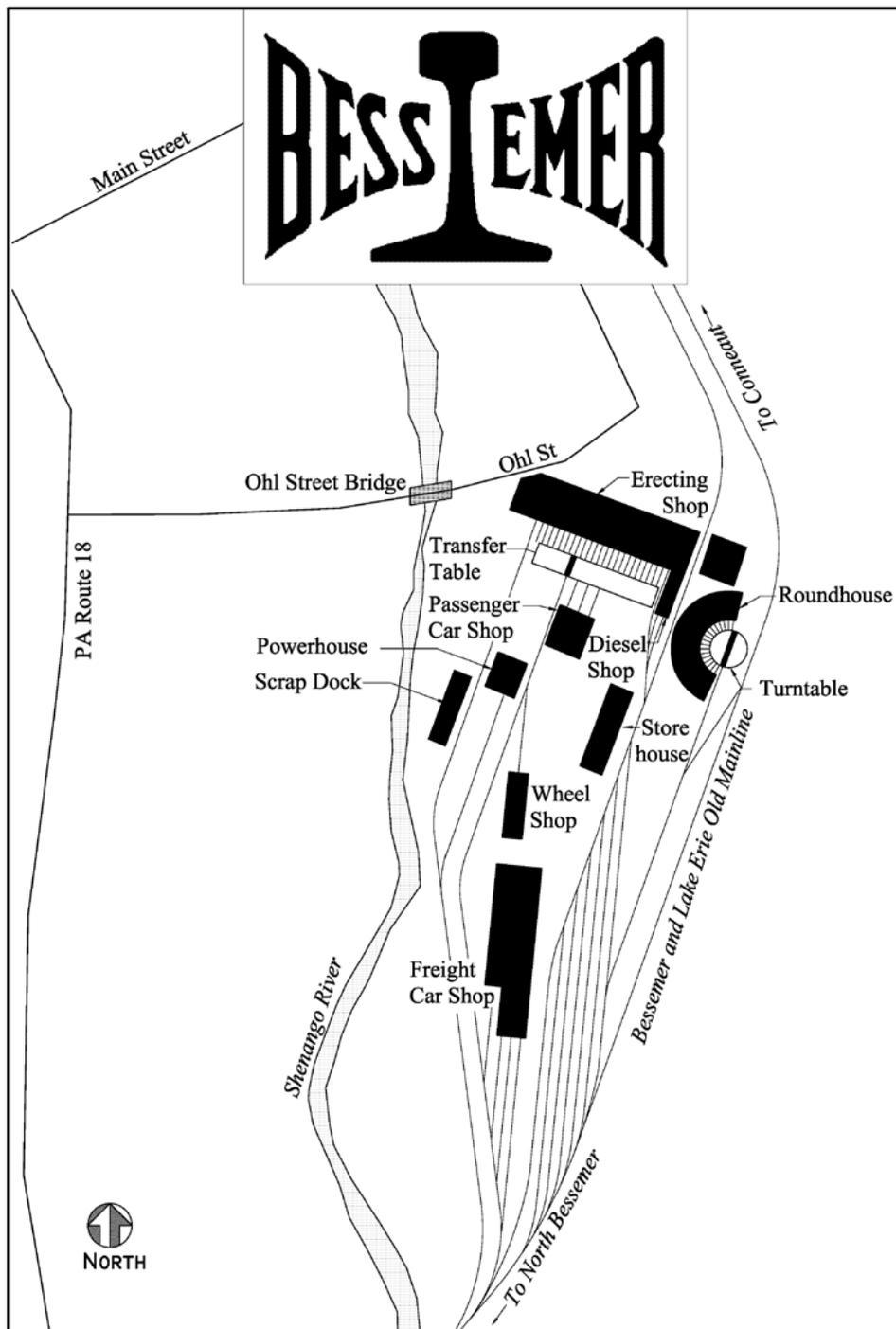


Figure 1. Map of Bessemer and Lake Erie Railroad, Greenville Shops complex, ca. 2006. Drawing by Christopher H. Marston, HAER Architect.