



The Morgantown and Kingwood Railroad's shops and only real yard were at Sabraton, West Virginia, just southeast of Morgantown. This photo is dated as taken in 1917; see also the 1918 track chart on page 13. When construction of the M&K began near here in July 1899 the area was known as Sturgiss City. It was renamed in the early 1900s. (Bob Kennedy collection)

The B&O's M&K Branch

Tapping the Deckers Creek Valley

Compiled by Robert F. Kennedy

The Morgantown and Kingwood Railroad was once a most significant transportation facility for Preston and Monongalia counties. From about 1920 on, it operated as the M&K Branch of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, continuing in importance through the mid-century mark before declining as the coal and coke facilities it serviced also declined.

A well-designed pamphlet, dating from about 1912, helps to bring to life those days when the M&K Railroad was opening up the Deckers Creek valley of northern West Virginia. This publication, bearing the title *Wondrous West Virginia*, was an advertising medium published by the railroad company.

Sen. Stephen B. Elkins, the pamphlet says, saw the desirability of connecting the B&O line at Morgantown with

the B&O mainline at Rowlesburg, near Kingwood.

"So the Morgantown and Kingwood was built, and built to stay. The builders of the road put down the finest roadbed that men could make, equipped it with the heaviest rails and provided the best rolling stock that money could buy. It is the section surrounding the Morgantown and Kingwood Railroad, in the very heart of this region, continuous with the Connellsville basin and in easy reach of the Pittsburgh (PA) market; it is this section to which this little book would call attention."

"The awakening of this section seems almost like a dream. A few years ago Deckers Creek and a tortuous trail were used, principally by the mountain people, to bring their small products to the river.

Here and there stood a mountain cabin, but the country was sparsely populated, for it offered only a meager existence to the population."

"Today, less than 10 years from the opening of the Morgantown and Kingwood Railroad, we see a perfectly equipped road with thousands of coke and coal cars, saw mills supplied with the very latest and most efficient machinery, cement manufactories in operation, great banks of sand opened, limestone quarries sending stone near and far and many other great industries in full blast, occupying this same section of country, giving employment to thousands of people and populating the hills and valleys with thrifty and energetic citizenship. Capital has received amazing amounts on the original investments, and today the



ABOVE: B&O put at least three units on a turn working from M&K Junction the 12.2 miles to Caddell in September 1982. *(Chris Strogen collection)*

AT LEFT: Hanging Rock was a scenic feature of the M&K about 12 miles east of Morgantown. The roadbed is now a bike trail. *(Terry E. Arbogast photograph)*



ABOVE: At the lumber mill in Caddell in 2002, some of CSX's newest power was on the turn. *(Strogen)*

AT LEFT: The two big diesels of CSX Train lead their train across the Caddell turn, lead their train across the river near the Patriot Prep coal plant. *(Strogen)*

AT RIGHT: This shot of MK Tower at the junction was taken during the celebration of the 100th birthday of the B&O's Tray Run Viaduct in 2007. "The helpers were out...so we shot the tower instead," photographer Dwight Johnson.



END OF THE LINE: This was M&K Junction in October 1967. The resident plow and flanger, X26 and X43, sit at the shop. The M&K branch begins its run along the Cheat River just to the left of the tank cars. (Carl Stillwell photograph; B&ORRHS collection)



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By 1958 the B&O had an up-to-date diesel shop in Cumberland, Maryland, the heart of steam country. As fast as diesels became available, B&O put them in place of steam locomotives. (B&ORRHS collection)

A Momentous Time for the B&O

1958 Was a Pivotal Year for the Railroad

By John P. Hankey

There are certain years in B&O history that are special.

In 1830, the railroad attained its first terminus and operated its first steam locomotive. By 1852, the railroad had reached the Ohio River. In many ways, the centennial year of 1927 represented the company's zenith. These "special" years come easily to mind because the B&O spent decades crafting the stories it wanted us to remember.

Other years were equally momentous, but for different—and often unpleasant—reasons. The Strike of 1877 ignited on the B&O before spreading across the country and threatening to turn revolutionary. In 1896, the railroad entered receivership and barely managed to survive. Perhaps the most melancholy was 1987, when CSX extinguished the B&O charter and formally ended its existence.

It seems that 1958 was one of those years, too.

A half-century later, we remember it mainly for the railroad's last regular use of steam, and for the end of passenger service east of Baltimore. Yet even with those unfortunate events, we still look back to that B&O as the "golden age"—a time when the company retained its identity, pride, and physical presence. As troubled as the late 1950s were for the B&O, few of us would miss the chance to go back.

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The year 1958 began somewhat inauspiciously in the grip of a hard winter—the kind more common 50 years ago. Two major storms disrupted operations east of the Alleghenies. Carloadings were dropping as the nation slid into recession. Automotive production fell rapidly and the B&O was particularly hard-hit. In late 1957, the B&O had announced its intention to end all passenger service east of Baltimore. That meant a parade

of railroad officials appearing before state public service commissions, editorial boards, and community groups to explain why the company was taking such drastic measures.

Early in the year, Du Bois Car Shop was busy turning out the last of 400 M-67 and 600 M-66 boxcars and 500 O-65 gondolas. Bethlehem Steel was busy assembling the B&O's large order for 2,000 W-9 70-ton coal cars, and Du Bois likewise was at work rebuilding another 700 N-35 and N-37 hoppers. But as the year wore on and the railroad found itself with 20,000 idled cars, the equipment program was halted and carmen got their furlough notices.

In New York, the company completed a new transload facility at Chelsea Freight Station (Pier 63 on the North River). At Columbus, Ohio, it opened a new locomotive terminal and yard in October. The State of Maryland began