

A Short History of the
Valley Division



KANAWHA, BUFFALO & THURMOND
RAILROAD

Kanawha Buffalo & Thurmond

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KANAWHA

Preface

A Short History of the **Valley Division**

This short history of the Kanawha, Buffalo & Thurmond's Valley Division was prepared under the direction of Leonard M. Cowherd, Chief Historian of the KB&T. Mr. Cowherd is the grandson of the KB&T's first Chief of Electrical Operations who supervised the installation of the railroad's original signal system in 1915 and later the electrification of the main line from Matoaka, W.Va., to Roanoke, Va., in 1926

L.M. Cowherd is President of the KB&T Historical Society and makes his home in Culpeper, Va., where he is active in numerous historical groups.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1

A Natural Transportation Route	2
Railroads Come to the Valley	3
Small Beginnings	6
Virginian Roots	7
KB&T Looks West	8
The Merger	10

Chapter 2

Today's Operation	12
Valley Division Branch Lines	15

Chapter 3

Railfanning The Kanawha	16
Steam Excursions	17
The Future	18
Suggestions for further reading.....	19

Introduction

Bankruptcies, receiverships, mergers, consolidations and entrepreneurial ventures are all part of the developmental history of American railroading. Today's Kanawha, Buffalo & Thurmond Railroad is a product of that history.

This booklet, prepared as part of the Kanawha's observance of the Bicentennial of the United States, traces the development of the Kanawha and then looks in more detail at the middle portion of the railroad — the Valley Division — which stretches 282 miles from the Ohio River crossing at Point Pleasant, W.Va. to Roanoke, Va.

The geography of the Valley Division ranges from the almost level river-side portion from Point Pleasant to Deepwater where line crosses from the north bank and begins its climb over the mountains toward Hampton Roads

The ruling eastbound grade is 2.7 percent from Elmore to Algonquin, West Virginia. Westbound on the Valley Division the ruling grade is 1.65 percent between Elmore and Jenny Gap, West Virginia.

Chapter 1

A Natural Transportation Route

Geologists believe the New River is a remnant of the ancient Teays River which once flowed across what are now the states of North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Ohio and Indiana before emptying into the Mississippi River. Glacial action later changed the course of the Teays River and created the Ohio River. Today's New River rises in Western North Carolina and flows 225 miles northwestward through Virginia and West Virginia until it meets the Gauley River at Gauley Bridge, West Virginia. There the New River changes its name to Kanawha and continues on its northwestward course until it empties into the Ohio River at Point Pleasant, W.Va.

The route of the New River has been used as a passage through the Appalachian Mountains for thousands of years. Shawnee Indians had many trails paralleling the river. In Colonial times, George Washington advocated building a canal to join the James River basin with the Ohio River basin west of the mountains. He was among the founders of the James River company which hoped to use the New and Kanawha river passages to link the Ohio River drainage with the James River thus opening

commerce with the interior of North America. After the Civil War when canals were largely replaced by railroads it was natural that the rapidly expanding railroad industry would want to use the same river routes with their easy grades to ease the passage across the mountains.

Railroads Come to the Valley

Railroads came to the Kanawha River valley in the 1850s when Ralph Swinburn built a gravity railroad on Field's Creek east of Charleston to deliver coal to barge traffic on the Kanawha River. Swinburn's railroad was on the south side of the Kanawha River about 2½ miles east of Marmet. In 1854 a steam locomotive was imported from England for use on the Field's Creek Coal Company railroad. In the 1870s the railroad underwent a reconstruction and became the Winifrede Railroad. In later years a connection was made with the main line of the Chesapeake & Ohio at the foot of Field's Creek.

The goal of most railroads building in southern West Virginia, was to move West Virginia smokeless coal east to tidewater Virginia for export and west to Midwestern steel mills. In 1873 the Chesapeake & Ohio completed its mainline through the New River Gorge and realized George Washington's dream of linking the James and Ohio River valleys. The c&o completed its main line east of Richmond to Newport News in 1882. At this point, coal began to move from West Virginia to tidewater Virginia in great quantities.

The Chesapeake & Ohio had taken the south bank of the Kanawha River for its passage through the Valley. Railroad building eastward from southern Ohio would soon claim the north side of the Kanawha as other visionaries sought to build across the mountains like the c&o. North of the Ohio River, the Atlantic and Lake Erie Railway Company (A&LE) planned to build across central Ohio to Toledo. The company changed its name to Ohio Central Railway (OCRY) in 1876. The company went into receivership in 1877. Another company, the Ohio Central Railroad Company (OCRR) took over from the previous Ohio Central and consolidated a number of smaller lines to emerge with a line stretching from Toledo on Lake Erie to the Ohio River near Point Pleasant, W.Va.

By the time the Ohio Central Railroad went into receivership in October of 1883 it had bridged the Ohio River and extended its line 58 miles along the north bank of the Kanawha River to Charleston thus opening the mineral riches of the Kanawha Valley to the Detroit, Toledo and Cleveland markets.

In October 1885 the line was sold to the Kanawha and Ohio Railway Company (K&O). However, by 1889 the Kanawha and Ohio was in the hands of a receiver. The Kanawha & Michigan (K&M) was chartered on April 25, 1890, as the successor to the Kanawha & Ohio. Its rails reached Gauley Bridge east of Charleston when it purchased and extended the Charleston & Gauley Bridge (C&GB) in 1893. This gave the K&O a c&o interchange at Gauley Bridge. The line opened for operation on August 21, 1893.

Primary traffic included coal, coke, salt, chrome ore and lime.

Meanwhile the Charleston, Clendenin & Sutton (cc&s) was building a line along the Elk River northward from Charleston. This line would eventually reach Elkins and connections there with the Western Maryland (wm) and Baltimore & Ohio (B&O).

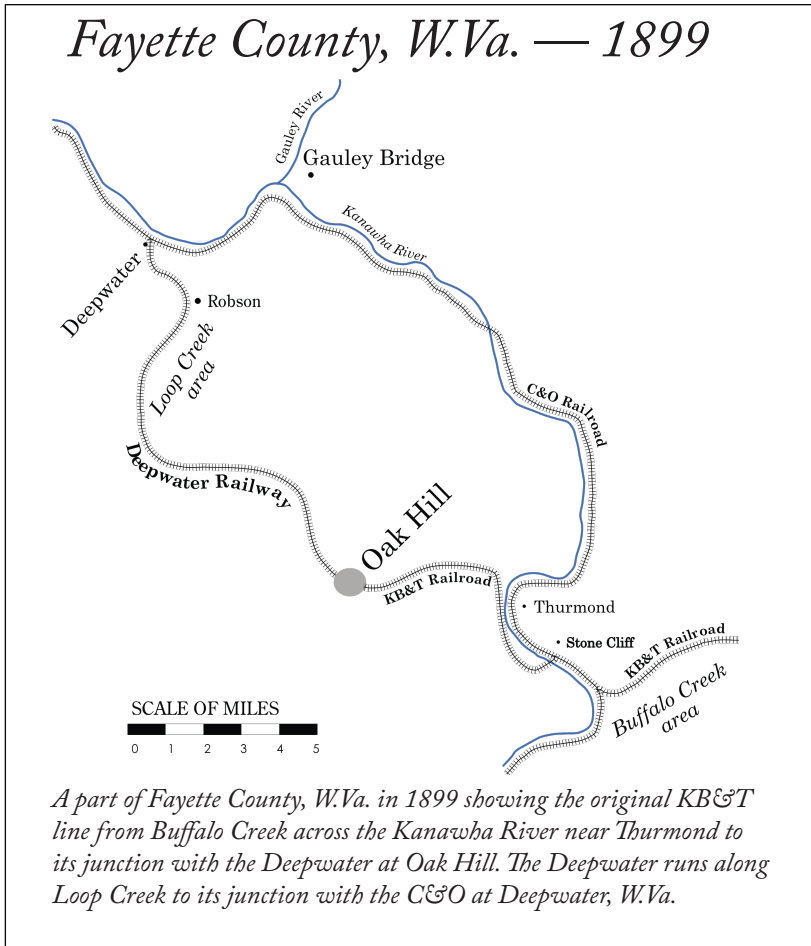
During the early part of the 20th Century the Kanawha & Michigan, although it remained an independent operation, was controlled by the Toledo & Ohio Central Railway Company and later the Hocking Valley Railway Company (HV).

In March of 1910 to answer an increasing mid-west demand for coal, the c&o acquired a controlling interest in the Hocking Valley so it could use the K&M line to Toledo. The c&o used its connection with the K&M at Gauley Bridge to move coal west. The West Virginia Board of Public Works 1912 valuation of railroads in the state showed the Kanawha & Michigan the seventh highest behind the Baltimore & Ohio, Chesapeake & Ohio, Norfolk & Western, Western Maryland, Virginian, and the Coal & Coke.

The K&M changed hands again in 1914 when the U.S. District Court forced the c&o to sell the K&M under terms of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. The K&M passed back to control of the Toledo & Ohio Central.

Small Beginnings

In the spring of 1897 a group in Virginia with an interest in railroads announced plans to construct a short-line in Fayette County, W.Va. to serve new coal mines being proposed along Buffalo Creek on the north



side of the Kanawha River a few miles east of Thurmond. The group hired a dashing young engineer, Kendall Smith, to survey and construct the line including bridge across the river near Thurmond.

By the spring of 1898, the Kanawha, Buffalo & Thurmond (KB&T) had begun laying 3 miles of rail on the north side of the Kanawha River along Buffalo Creek. At the mouth of Buffalo Creek the line turned down stream following the Kanawha River for about 2½ miles to the community of Stone Cliff where engineer Smith was constructing a massive masonry bridge across the Kanawha. The line continued along the south bank for another 2 miles to the mouth of Arbuckle Creek, just across the river from Thurmond. The KB&T followed Arbuckle Creek 3 miles to Oak Hill where it connected with the Deepwater Railroad which was then building south along Loop Creek from a terminus at the small community of Deepwater on the Kanawha River.

When the fall of 1899 arrived, the KB&T had bridged the Kanawha east of Thurmond and completed its connection with the Deepwater at Oak Hill. This event was greeted with an outburst of civic pride in Oak Hill. The town fathers commissioned Ralph Graves of Virginia to prepare a special musical salute at the ribbon cutting ceremony.

Virginian Roots

The Deepwater Railway was officially organized on

January 25, 1898 with the intention of serving a sawmill at Robson, W.Va. The Deepwater planned to move lumber to its c&o connection at the community of Deepwater on the Kanawha River. Its founders dreamed that the Deepwater Railway would eventually connect with the Norfolk & Western at Matoaka, W.Va. From Deepwater on the south side of the river, the new railroad built 3.8 miles of track up Loop Creek to Robson. The Deepwater slowly expanded southward toward Matoaka. In 1902 its charter was amended to show it extending to the Virginia State line. Two years later the Tidewater Railway Company was chartered in Virginia showing its line running from the West Virginia state line to Hampton Roads.

The owners of the Deepwater and Tidewater lines intended to join them and create a railroad to deliver coal to Hampton Roads over the easiest route available. On April 15, 1907 the Deepwater and Tidewater Railways were combined to form the Virginian Railway.

KB&T Looks West

The Kanawha, Buffalo & Thurmond operated for almost 14 years as a quiet shortline adding a mine here and there along its 10½ mile line. It delivered coal to the Virginian, successor to the Deepwater, at Oak Hill Junction (OH) and carried mining supplies to the mines along Buffalo and Arbuckle Creeks. But, as the Great War raged in Europe, the KB&T was poised to follow the advice of Horace Greeley and “go West.”

In 1913, the KB&T real estate department headed by Bruce Herndon, Vice-President Real Estate, negotiated trackage rights on the Virginian from Oak Hill Junction to the Virginian's bridge across the Kanawha River at Deepwater. The bridge had been completed in 1909 at a cost of \$300,00. On the north side of the river the Virginian connected to the Kanawha & Michigan and thereby to the mid-west. Eight years later these trackage rights would play an important part in the growth of the KB&T from a shortline into a significant regional railroad

On the first day of 1922 the Kanawha, Buffalo & Thurmond under the leadership of H. Watkins Ellerson, Chief Council for the railroad, bought the stock of the Toledo & Ohio Central and Kanawha & Michigan and combined all operations under the name Kanawha, Buffalo & Thurmond. Purchase of the K&M, combined with trackage rights on the Virginian between Oak Hill and Deepwater, gave the KB&T access to the growing commercial and chemical industry in the Charleston area. The KB&TK took over the K&M passenger station on Broad Street near downtown Charleston, gained access to the West Side warehouse district, the DuPont chemical plant at Belle, the Union Carbide facility at Institute, and the Monsanto chemical plant at Nitro. Just east of Belle, at Dickinson, W.Va., the KB&T built a large yard and shop facility in 1925.

The Merger

In the summer of 1925, the Norfolk & Western proposed a merger with the Virginian, but government officials in Virginia were opposed and convinced the Interstate Commerce Commission to deny the merger. Other railroads were also interested in acquiring the Virginian and the KB&T was ready to strike. In November 1925, the Kanawha, Buffalo & Thurmond was successful in its bid to buy a controlling interest in the Virginian. The two railroads maintained separate identities until after the Second World War.

In 1946 management decided to combine both roads under the KB&T reporting marks. Thus a new railroad emerged with 747 miles of main line stretching from Toledo, Ohio, to Hampton Roads, Virginia. Major branch lines included the Elk River Subdivision from Charleston, W. Va. to Elkins, W. Va. and the Guyandotte Subdivision from Elmore, W. Va. (Gulf Junction) to Gilbert, W. Va. where the former Virginian had a c&o interchange. The Guyandotte subdivision is a source for much of the westbound coal traffic seen on the Valley Division.

The combined railroads were called the "Kanawha"... the name by which the Kanawha, Buffalo & Thurmond had long been known. The new railroad retained the conservative Pullman Green and buff color scheme used by the KB&T for locomotives and passenger equipment. Diesel locomotives of the late 40s featured a mostly Pullman green livery. More buff was added to the paint

scheme in the 1950s

Lettering on diesels and freight equipment originally featured the single word “KANAWHA” using a large initial “K” and smaller capitals. No locomotives exist with that original style. Locomotive lettering evolved into a style where all the letters were the same height.

A few first generation KB&T diesels still carry a version of the green and buff paint scheme with the same-height KANAWHA lettering.

In May of 1966, Kanawha management unveiled a new paint image. The new grey and yellow locomotive paint scheme was designed by artist Tom Layman. Locomotives were painted grey with large white lettering on the long hood. Black hazard striping over yellow on the ends of the locos was chosen to make them more visible at grade crossings. Box cars and cabooses purchased after May of 1968 were painted in a bright yellow with black lettering.

The Kanawha’s “Special K Service”, using cushion underframe box cars, was begun in 1950 to give special handling to fragile loads. It inspired the name for a new cereal created by the Kellogg Company.

Chapter 2

Today's Operation

Passenger service on the KB&T ended in 1965 when RDC runs on the Elk River Subdivision were terminated. No Amtrak trains use KB&T rails on the Valley Division. Except for a few scheduled freights, most trains on the Valley Division run on an "extra" schedule.

While many railroads use alpha symbols for train designation, the Kanawha prefers to use numeric designations. This traditional system is familiar to crews. The traditional even-East, odd-West train number system is also used.

Motive power assignments are handled by computer which matches locomotive horsepower to the needs of individual trains. Kanawha locomotive numbers do not relate to horsepower.

Train 120 the East Owl leaves Lake Yard in Toledo at 6PM running on a 14 hour schedule to Newport News. Number 120 usually carries autos racks and auto parts from Detroit area assembly plants. The Owl stops to change crews at Dickinson yard just east of Charleston. Its run over the Valley Division is usually in the dark of night. Its counterpart 121, the West Owl, departs Newport News in the early evening usually about 5PM for an 15

hour run west to Toledo.

Early morning finds 160 passing through the Valley. Its piggyback consist offers trucking companies an alternative to the steep and twisting mid-west-to-southeast roads that cross the rugged Appalachian mountains of West Virginia and Virginia. 160 and westbound 161 stop at Toledo, Columbus, Charleston, Roanoke and Newport News.

Mixed freights 150 and 151, running between Columbus and Roanoke, pass through the Valley in late morning, usually between 10AM and 12:32PM. Most any type of freight car and power can be found on these trains

Mid afternoon finds 262, a mixed freight, running from Columbus-to-Charleston and 263 running from Charleston-to-Columbus. Trains 262 and 263 do not usually make intermediate stops, but occasionally 262 stops at Athens, OH at the B&O interchange.

In the late afternoon or early evening look for 200 and 221, mixed freights running from Charleston-to-Roanoke and Roanoke-to-Charleston. They are comparable to trains 262 and 263. An intermediate stop is sometimes made at Princeton, W.Va.

Usual consist of the scheduled freights is as follows:
train # usual consist: normal power

120 box cars, auto racks: SD 40-2, GP 38-2, GP 40-2

121 box cars, auto racks: SD 40-2, GP 38-2, GP 40-2

150 mixed freight: any type of locomotive

151 mixed freight: any type of locomotive

160 piggyback: SD 40-2, GP 38-2, GP 40-2, C-630

-
- 161 piggyback/: SD 40-2, GP 38-2, GP 40-2, C-630
- 220 box cars, tank cars, covered hoppers, gondolas, coil steel, pulpwood: GP 38, GP 40, GP 30, C-425, SD 40, SD 35, C-630, C-628
- 221 box cars, tank cars, covered hoppers, gondolas, coil steel, pulpwood: GP 38, GP 40, GP 30, C-425, SD 40, SD 35, C-628
- 262 box cars, tank cars, covered hoppers, gondolas, coil steel, pulpwood: GP 38, GP 40, GP 30, C-425, SD 40, SD 35, C-628
- 263 box cars, tank cars, covered hoppers, gondolas, coil steel, pulpwood: GP 38, GP 40, GP 30, C-425, SD 40, SD 35, C-628

Extra runs from Dickinson Yard include both east and westbound coal as well as “Mine Turns” delivering empties and gathering loads. “Plant Runs” of box and tank cars head to Monsanto, Union Carbide and du Pont. “Locals” work sidings west of Dickinson to Nitro and east to Oak Hill.

Power on the Mine Turns and Plant Runs can range from RS 11S to GP 40S. The Dickinson Yardmaster Chad Gates will use any power available, but since newer locomotives are on the through trains, they don’t often originate at Dickinson Yard. There is a complete KB&T locomotive roster in Appendix A.

On the Valley Division, the KB&T interchanges with the Chessie System (C&O) at Deepwater and Charleston. Chessie System (Western Maryland/B&O) traffic also

comes into Charleston via the Elk River Subdivision line to Elkins. Other interchanges on the KB&T that effect traffic seen in the Valley are: B&O (Athens, Oh.); Penn Central (Columbus, Oh.); Norfolk & Western (Roanoke, Va.); Southern (Alta Vista, Va.) and Seaboard (Jarratt, Va. just west of Newport News).

Valley Division Branch Lines

The original KB&T built in the late 1890s became a branch line after the 1925 merger. However, by 1960, the mines on Buffalo Creek were no longer producing coal and the line was abandoned. The Kanawha River bridge near Thurmond was sold to the U.S. Government in 1971 for use in a proposed New River National Park.

The Kanawha still operates a 3 mile branch line on Arbuckle Creek. That line was once part of the KB&T main. Beard's Fork is still in operation although coal output is down greatly. The Campbell's Creek branch was abandoned in 1956.

The former Charleston, Clendenin & Sutton, now the Elk River Subdivision, was acquired by the KB&T in 1932. Today it provides a connection with the Chessie System (former Western Maryland and B&O) at Elkins W.Va. The Elk River Subdivision provides pulpwood loads from Eastern West Virginia as well as service to small manufacturing firms found along the line.

Chapter 3

Railfanning The Kanawha

A must for anyone railfanning the KB&T is the June 1975 article in *Railfan Magazine* by Tony Koester, President of the Allegheny Midland Railroad. It provides a good map with prime photo locations noted and train schedules included. KB&T management is generally accommodating to railfans. However, before venturing on the property, a visitor should contact the Chief of Railroad Security Capt. Nelson Tucker to get clearance.

In Charleston numerous city streets provide good photo locations without venturing on the property. East of Charleston, U.S. Route 60 parallels the mainline to the Deepwater bridge. On the south side of the river West Virginia 61 roughly follows the mainline to Oak Hill. You will find many fine photo spots close by highways 60 and 61.

The Kanawha Dispatching Center in Charleston can usually accommodate railfan requests for train movement information by calling 304-346-1212. Chief Dispatcher Bob Ward and Computer Center Director John Vines created a unique service for railfans: FanFind®. Railfans can get up to the minute information on train movements

in the valley at the railfan computer terminal at the KB&T station on Broad Street.

Prime photo spots are the c&o interchange bridge across the Kanawha in Charleston, the Route 60 highway bridge east of Charleston at the foot of Campbell's Creek, Dickinson Yard, and the 2155 foot bridge crossing the Kanawha River at Deepwater. East of Deepwater numerous rural scenes are found along highway 61.

Steam Excursions

The last steam revenue operations on the KB&T were in 1951 and the last steam type to operate in revenue service is the first to be renovated for excursion service. In 1974 the KB&T Vice-President for Steam Operations, Jim Stettner, led the effort to acquire a former c&o 2-8-4 (known on both the Chesapeake & Ohio and the KB&T as the "Kanawha" type). Both the c&o and the KB&T had many 2-8-4s, but the KB&T dieselized much earlier than the c&o and thus all previous KB&T 2-8-4 s were gone. It is planned to have the 2-8-4 (#1776) ready for Bicentennial operations in the summer of 1976. Trainmaster Donnie Herndon, will be at the throttle for the summer round trips from Point Pleasant to Oak Hill, W.Va

The Future

Today's ever changing railroad environment probably means more changes are in store for the Kanawha, Buffalo & Thurmond. The Norfolk & Western has reportedly made overtures about acquiring the KB&T. The KB&T stands ready to enter the 1980s with a first-rate physical plant and a sound balance sheet. Of course down turns in the economy or coal production would have a great impact. Expansion of the electrification of the mainline, completed in southern West Virginia in the 1920s, is often a subject of speculation. Rising fuel costs may push the catenary into Virginia and through the Valley division.

Suggestions for further reading—

Kanawha County Images: A Bicentennial History
1788-1988 by Stan Cohen, Pictorial Histories Publishing
Company, Charleston, W.Va.

Chesapeake & Ohio Historical Society, *Magazine*

Recollections, by Harry Frazier, published by the
Chesapeake & Ohio Historical Society, Alderson, W.Va.,
1975

Storming Heaven, Denise Giardina, W. W. Norton
& Company, New York, 1987

The Virginian Railway, by H. Reid, published by
Kalmbach Publishing Company, Milwaukee, Wis., 1961

History of Charleston and Kanawha County West
Virginia Part I, by W. S. Laidley, published by
Richmond-Arnold Publishing Co., Chicago, Ill, 1911

The Hocking Valley Railway, by Edward H. Miller,
published by the Chesapeake & Ohio Historical Society,
Alderson, W.Va., 1984

Myers' History of West Virginia, Volume II, New
Martinsville, W.Va., 1914

The James From Iron Gate to the Sea, by Blair Niles,
published by Rinehart and Company, New York, 1945

Appendix A

Kanawha, Buffalo & Thurmond

Master Diesel Locomotive Numbering Scheme

Dickinson Shops, Dickinson, WV 25302

Road Number	Model	Builder	Years Built	Year Bought	Horsepower
100-104	S2	ALCO	40-50	1948	1000
105-109	S4	ALCO	50-61	1954	1000
120-129	T6	ALCO	58-69	1960	1000
200-209	PA-1	ALCO	46-50	1947	2000
230-239	F7-B	EMD	49-53	1949	1500
240-249	F7-A	EMD	49-53	1949	1500
250-259	E8-B	EMD	49-53	1951	2000
260-269	E8-A	EMD	49-53	1951	2250
300-324					
GP 7	EMD	49-54	1950	1500	
325-339	RS 3	ALCO	50-56	1955	1600
340-359	RSD 5	ALCO	52-56	1953	1600
360-399	GP 9	EMD	54-59	54-57	1750
400-414	SD 9	EMD	54-59	1956	1750
415-429	RS 11	ALCO	56-61	1957	1800
430-434	RSD12	ALCO	56-63	1957	1800
450-459	GP 20	EMD	59-62	1960	2000
460-464	SD 24	EMD	58-63	1960	2400
470-479	GP 18	EMD	59-63	1962	1800
485-489	SD 18	EMD	60-63	1962	1800
520-529	GP 30	EMD	61-63	1963	2250
530-534	U25B	GE	59-66	1965	2500
540-549	C-420	ALCO	63-68	1965	2000
565-574	C-425	ALCO	63-67	1966	2400
600-624	C-628	ALCO	63-68	1966	2750
635-644	SD 35	EMD	64-66	1966	2500
650-664	GP 35	EMD	63-66	1966	2500
725-734	C-630	ALCO	65-67	1967	3000
740-759	SD 40	EMD	66-71	1967	3000
775-784	C-636	ALCO	67-68	1967	3600
800-824	GP 40	EMD	65-71	1970	3000
830-849	GP 38	EMD	66-71	1970	2000
850-874	GP 38-2	EMD	72-	1973	2000
900-924	GP 40-2	EMD	72-	1974	3000
950-999	SD 40-2	EMD	72-	1974	3000

NOTES:

1. The green & buff paint scheme with the old "KANAWHA, BUFFALO & THURMOND" arched lettering stye began in summer of 1952. Small block "KANAWHA" began in 1955
2. Large lettering on green & buff was introduced in 1959. Most units have been repainted. Only a few GP 7, GP 9 and RS 3s still have the smaller "KANAWHA" lettering used from 1955 to 1959
3. The grey & yellow paint scheme began with the Alco C-425 order delivered in March, 1966

Index

A

Amtrak 15
Atlantic and Lake Erie 7

B

Baltimore & Ohio 8
Beard's Fork 18
Buffalo Creek 9, 18

C

Charleston & Gauley Bridge 7
Charleston, Clendenian & Sutton 8
Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad 6

D

Deepwater 17
Deepwater bridge 20, 21
Deepwater, community of 10, 12
Deepwater Railroad 10, 11

E

Electrification 22
Elk River Subdivision 18
Ellerson, Watkins 12

F

FanFind 20
Fayette County, W.Va. 9
Field's Creek 6
Freights, scheduled 15

G

Gates, Chad 17
Gauley Bridge 7, 8

Graves, Ralph 10
Guyandotte Subdivision 13

H

Herndon, Bruce 11
Herndon, Donnie 21
Hocking Valley 8

K

Kanawha & Michigan 7
Kanawha & Ohio Railway 7
Kanawha, Buffalo & Thurmond 10. See also Kanawha: KB&T
Kanawha, river 5
Koester, Tony 20

L

Layman, Tom 14

N

New River 5
Norfolk & Western 12

O

Ohio Central Railroad 7
Ohio Central Railway 7

P

paint scheme 13

S

Sherman Anti-Trust Act 8
Smith, Kendall 9
Stettner, Jim 21
Swinburn, Ralph 6

T

Teays River 5

Thurmond 9

Toledo & Ohio Central 8

Tucker, Nelson 20

V

Virginian 12

W

Ward, Bob 20

