

Mountain Thunder In The Night

written by: Michael Yeomans
Pittsburgh Tribune-Review

A trip to Allegany County will show you how Americans moved about in the country's first century. Here you can stand at mile zero of the National Road, the first congressionally funded highway; tour a replica canal boat at the terminal of the former C&O Canal; ride a steam train through nearly virgin countryside; and view horse-drawn carriages, delivery wagons and open sleighs.

The trip back in time begins upon stepping out of your car in Cumberland, Maryland, and onto a platform of the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad Station. There awaits the mammoth black Mountain Thunder steam engine coupled to early 20th-century rolling stock.

Excursions are offered daily as well as periodic specials, such as a murder mystery dinner train and comedy dinner train. In October, Cumberland celebrates its annual Rail Fest.

The steam whistle blows, and billowing black clouds of smoke and cinder shoot skyward as the train rolls out of the station heading west on its 16-mile twisting voyage through forest and farmland.

Along the way, the train disappears into a 914-foot-long tunnel, arcs along a horse shoe bend and passes tiny towns that time seems to have left behind. Then it pulls into the former Cumberland and Pennsylvania station in the town of Frostburg.

The engine uncouples and chugs onto an electric turntable to be slowly rotated until it faces east and passes the passenger coaches and couples at the opposite end for the journey back.

While in Frostburg, passengers have an hour and a half — depending on how quickly they can get off the train — to have lunch in town. A cluster of shops and a café surround the train station, along with a must-see treat, the Thrasher Carriage Museum, which offers free admission with a train ticket.

Amassed by a prominent Allegany County resident during the past century, the museum is filled on two floors with painstakingly restored carriages, phaetons (touring cars), sleighs and wagons. Guides in early-American garb recall tales of places long ago traveled in these horse-drawn vehicles.

It is fitting that such a collection resides in western Maryland, because the construction of the National Road began here in 1811. Authorized by Congress in 1803, the first leg of the crushed stone road, also known as National Pike or the Cumberland Road, connected Cumberland to Wheeling, West Virginia, by 1818. It connected the Potomac River and the Ohio River (in early America, water was the chief mode of transporting large amounts of goods).

Originally intended to reach St. Louis, the road ended short of its goal in Illinois when railroads and canals took precedence in the mid-to late 19th century. However, it did help to build Cumberland into a thriving town where carriage and stagecoach manufacturing prospered.

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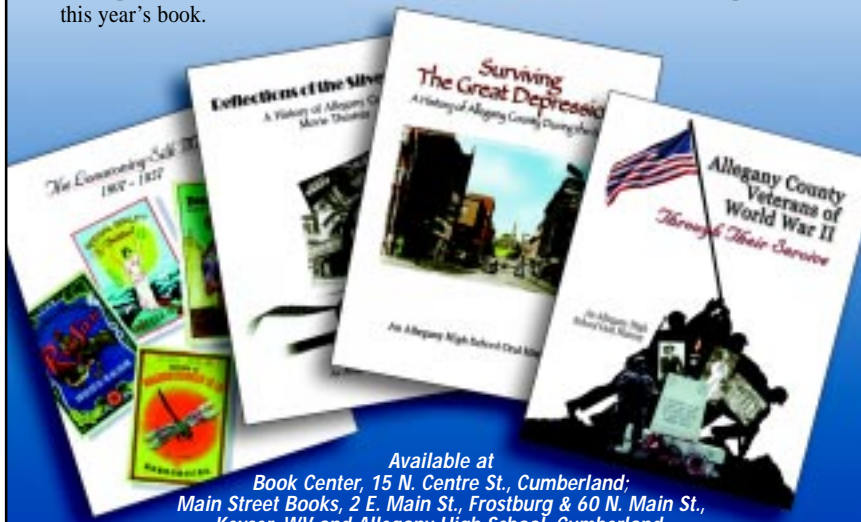


photography by: Lance C. Bell

Historical Publications of Local Interest

Produced by Allegany High School Students

2002 marks the fourth year in our series of award winning publications focusing on historical events in Allegany County. Written, designed and produced by Social Studies Seminar students, these publications have become an important service learning tool, as well as a significant contribution to local history. Additionally, students created a video production with interviews from local World War II Veterans to complement this year's book.



Available at
Book Center, 15 N. Centre St., Cumberland;
Main Street Books, 2 E. Main St., Frostburg & 60 N. Main St.,
Keyser, WV and Allegany High School, Cumberland.

Mountain Thunder Schedule



L. Bell

Mountain Thunder offers Murder Mystery Trains, Dinner Trains, Gourmet Cooking Trains, Comedy Express, Fall Foliage Excursions, Train Robberies, Santa Express, Polar Express and much more.

Regular Scenic Excursion Schedule:
11:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. Round Trip
Cumberland - Frostburg, Maryland
(1-1/2 hour layover in Frostburg)

May - September
Tues. - Thurs.: Diesel Engine
Fri. - Sun.: Steam Locomotive

October
Mon. - Wed.: Diesel Engine
Thurs. - Sun.: Steam Locomotive

November - December
Sat. & Sun. until mid-December:
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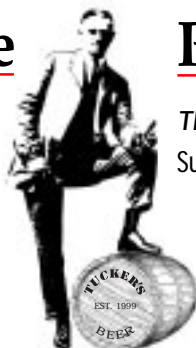
Uncle Tucker's

Brew House

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Pizza Cellar

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