

# Why the Phoenixville, Valley Forge and Strafford Railway Never Reached Strafford

Mike Bertram

In Bowman and Cox's<sup>1</sup> discussion of the history of the Phoenixville, Valley Forge, and Strafford Railway they say: "This time the dispute rose over the route to be followed through Valley Forge and the line came to an abrupt halt just after crossing Valley Creek. The land necessary to continue was donated to the state by the prominent Republican politician, Philander C. Knox, to be preserved as park land."

Although these statements are true, they are also confusing. Below is my understanding of the history.

By 1913 the State Park had purchased an arc of land on the east side of Valley Creek contiguous from the Schuylkill River to Valley Creek. The hostility of the park authorities may well have been the reason the railway could not progress on the east side of Valley Creek.

The railway company investigated the possibility of running down the west side of Valley Creek, but it is not clear that there was actually the space to do this as the large mill pond was still in existence on the creek. General Benjamin Franklin Fisher—see the short biography below—was a large landowner in the area at this time. Part of his land ran along the west side of Valley Creek in Schuylkill Township as far south as the Tredyffrin Township line. On the 10th of February 1915, Fisher, for the nominal sum of \$1, granted the railway company the right of way to run the railway across his land.

The land on the west side of the creek in Tredyffrin Township was owned by Senator Knox. Rather than give the railway company a right of way, he gave the park an easement that included the right to purchase this portion of his land in the future. (This land included the site of the upper forge although it was covered by the mill pond at the time.) This easement stymied the initiative to run the railway down the west side of the creek.

General Fisher died on the 9th of September 1915. In 1916 the park completed condemnation proceedings on the part of late General's land next to Valley Creek, finally putting an end to any idea of the railway getting to Strafford.

The land in Tredyffrin Township, originally owned by Senator Knox, was still shown as under covenant in 1942 and 1947 maps of the park. By 1976 it had become part of the park.

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Benjamin Franklin Fisher was a Union soldier who first served as a Captain in the 3rd Pennsylvania Reserves. He was then promoted to Major and became the Chief Signal Officer of the Army of the Potomac. He subsequently was promoted to Colonel and assumed the position of Chief Signal Officer of the United States Army. He was brevetted Brigadier General of Volunteers for "faithful and meritorious services during the war." After the war Fisher practiced law in Montgomery County.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Stanley P. Bowman, Jr. and Harold E. Cox. *Trolleys of Chester County, Pennsylvania*. Forty Fort, Pa.: Harold E. Cox, 1975. p. 64.

<sup>2</sup>"Benjamin Franklin Fisher (1834-1915)." PictureHistory.

<http://www.picturehistory.com/find/p/7276/mcmc.html>

"Benjamin Franklin Fisher Papers." Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

<http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/bah/dam/mg/mg175.htm>