Do you remember when you were a child the many trains that passed through Frackville? The whistle of a steam locomotive was heard many times as you were lying in bed. People could tell the time of day by the trains coming in on schedule, as they usually did. For more than a century to go by train was the most glorious way to go! Many people went to Niagara Falls on a Pullman honeymoon and excursions to basketball and football games and vacations to the shore were quite the thing.

The first train in our area was run on January 1, 1842. It ran from Pottsville to Philadelphia, pulled by the locomotive, Nichols and Harrison. The first railroad in Frackville was built in 1862, after rich deposits of coal were found in this vicinity. The entire road, including Mahanoy Plane was built by George G. Roberts, Chief Engineer. Frackville was only a village and most of the miners came from St. Clair and other towns. A "Miner's Train" had to be sent daily to take the miners to the mines and this ran twice a day.

On January 17, 1871, the largest anthracite mining corporation in the world, the Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company, affiliated with the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad was formed through the efforts of Franklin B. Gowen. In 1886, the Philadelphia and Reading Company started to extend its road to Shenandoah. As railroad transportation was faster, it soon completely took over the stage coach business. On January 29, 1893, the Reading Terminal, Twelfth and Market street, Philadelphia was opened.

Everything was shipped by rail at this time. Coal was the most abundant product to be shipped. Trains pulled hundreds of cars filled with coal. Extra engines were used to help push the terrific tonnage up the steep grades. Mr. A. Farrell of Ashland said, "At least fifty individual breakers, employing 10,000 men, furnished anthracite coal. Seventy-five per cent of which was hoisted over the Mahanoy Plane. The other thirty per cent was western shipments which were weighed at the Mahanoy Plane Scale and moved west to Newberry Junction and West Milton for consignments to New York State, the New England States and Canada. These breakers extended from Buck Mountain to Trevorton until the construction in 1928 of Locust Summit Breaker and the St. Nicholas Central Breaker in 1932. These eliminated all of the Reading Anthracite Individual breakers. At least forty tracks were installed at Locust Summit Breaker. The coal was then dropped by gravity to the huge yard which held 1200 railroad cars. The St. Nicholas Breaker had 35 tracks and held 1000 cars.

Unfortunately at the time these two giants began operation, the depression of the thirties had set in, and a coal broker sat up all night trying to sell a car of coal. The decline of the anthracite market was responsible for the closing of the Plane in 1932. From that time up until the end breaker of World War II the anthracite market was at a very low ebb. With the closing of the planes, coal formerly moved over the plane, was transported through the Tamaqua gateway.

World War II changed the picture and again coal became King. Coal, again was on the move. What with troop movements, war materials, together with the regular run of merchandise freight all on the increase, this created a heavy burden on Tamaqua yard which did not have the classification facilities of the St. Clair yards, which at this time were only handling the coal produced south of the mountain.

In 1944, engineers were engaged in reducing the grade of the spur from St. Nicholas to Frackville. This was the route of the passenger trains running from Gordon to Pottsville. Stops were made by the passenger trains, at Frackville, St. Clair, Port Carbon and Pottsville. The reduction of the heavy grade made it possible for a four unit diesel hook up to move fifty cars of anthracite from the St. Nicholas yards through to the St. Clair yards. Prior to the reduction in grade, the biggest steam engine could only handle ten cars from St. Nicholas to Frackville.

With the fall of anthracite markets, the Reading Railroad which was an offspring of the Anthracite Region, is hanging by its boot straps in our region. We had terminals which included car shops, engine houses, section gangs, employing hundreds of people at Mahanoy Plane, Gordon, Shamokin, St. Clair, Tamaqua and Newberry Junction. All have disappeared within a short period of time.

Years makes changes they say, sometimes for the worse, sometimes for the better—Who knows, maybe our next turn will be for the better."