

### The Bridge Tender and Station Master

By Larry Kidder

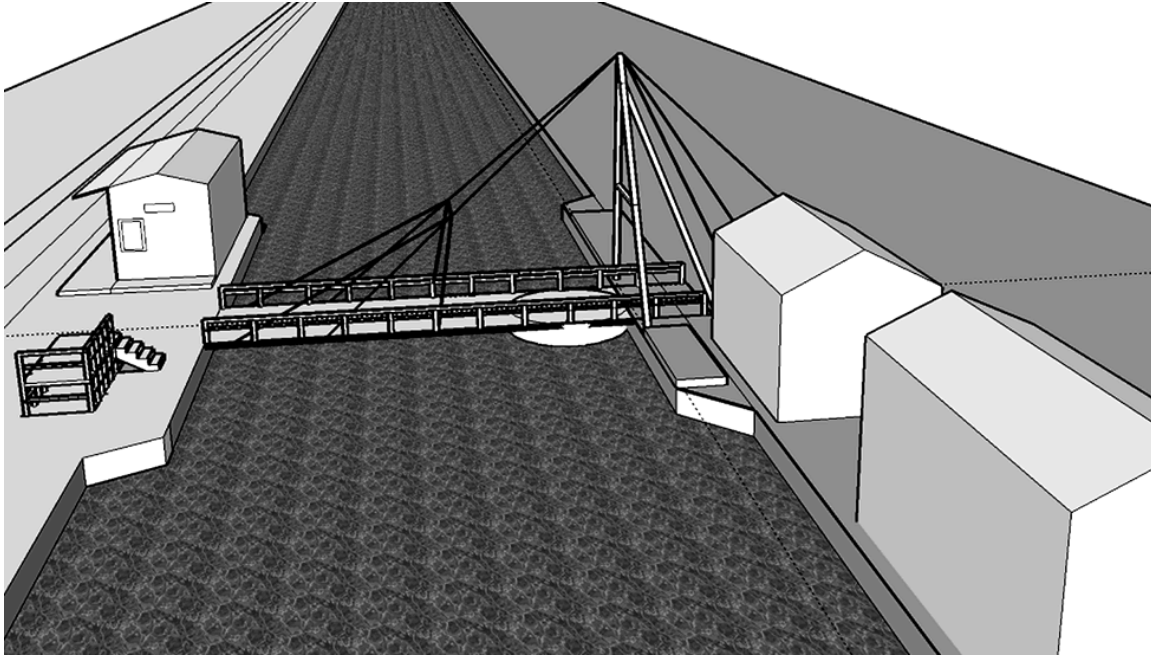
On the night of May 21, 1907 a small group of men from a work train found the body of the aged man lying on the floor of the station. Patrons of the station had seen him during the day, seemingly as well as usual, while he attended to his duties until after the 10:10 train had passed through. But, shortly after that he had simply dropped dead. He had turned 79 the previous February 22 and, although able to carry on his work, for several years his health had been in decline and he had suffered a series of strokes, paralysis it was called then, that left him unable to speak clearly and people had a hard time understanding him. The local people remembered him as quiet and unassuming, someone who always had a cheerful word for the people who came and went at the station and who was respected by all those who knew him. His name was Reuben Jones and for the past 31 years he had been responsible for both the canal bridge on the Delaware and Raritan feeder canal and the railroad station on the Belvidere Division of the Pennsylvania Railroad at the hamlet called Moore's Station at the western end of Pleasant Valley Road.

The cluster of canal and railroad buildings at the station, and the comings and goings of the people using them, were Reuben's world for most of his adult life. He was born nearby in 1828 and worked as a laborer and shoemaker in the area for some time before he moved into the canal bridge tender's house in March 1876. The Delaware and Raritan Canal Company built the feeder canal in the early 1830s to provide water for its main canal connecting New Brunswick and Trenton that shortened the water transportation route between New York City and Philadelphia by crossing New Jersey instead of going around it. The feeder was also designed to carry barge traffic, especially coal and iron from the Lehigh and Bethlehem regions of Pennsylvania. To allow people to cross the canal the company built bridges at frequent intervals, 37 of them on the 22 1/2 mile feeder, and one was placed at what became Moore's Station.

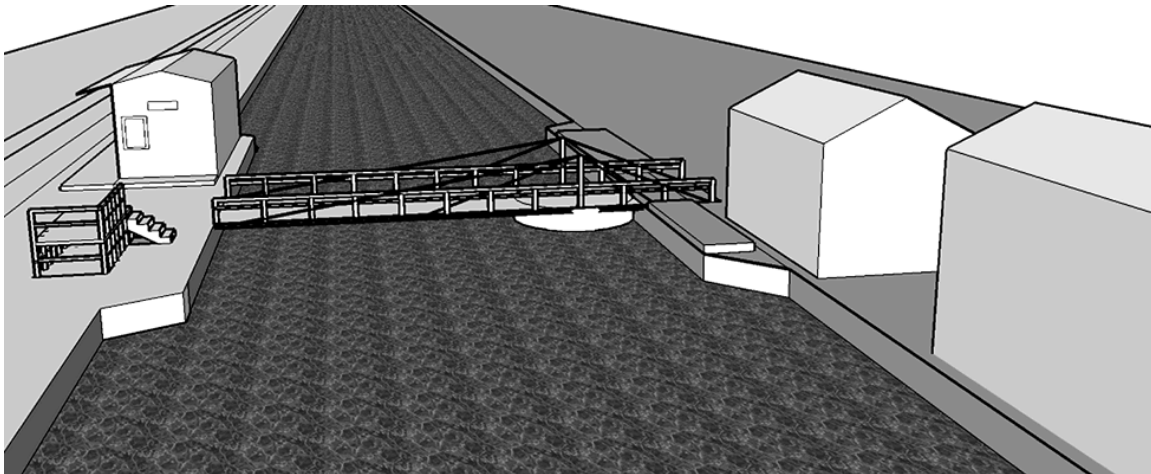
Since the bridges were obstacles to the canal barges they had to swing open. A large "A frame" structure with cables to the bridge deck supported it, while underwater cables allowed the bridge to pivot so it paralleled the canal to allow barges to pass. Around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, heavier traffic on the bridges caused the company to replace the A frame bridges with swinging king post bridges that were stronger, but still so well balanced and easy to turn that one person could manage it.

From its inception, the canal was to be paired with the railroad. As early as 1830 the Delaware and Raritan Canal Company consolidated with the Camden & Amboy Railroad and a rail line was planned to parallel the canal. The rail line along the feeder canal was built using the original canal tow path as the rail bed, and when it was completed between Trenton and Lambertville in 1851 one of the seven stations was placed by the canal bridge at the end of Pleasant Valley Road. Most of the new stations took the names of towns, like Lambertville and Titusville, or specific locations, such as Cadwalader Park. But, the little station at the canal bridge at Pleasant Valley Road needed a name. The name chosen recognized a family that had owned large tracts of land in the area of the station for several generations. It was named for Amos Moore, whose family came to Hopewell in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century with several other early Hopewell settlers from Long Island. Amos Moore owned substantial amounts of land on the south side of Pleasant Valley Road; stretching from the Delaware River inland almost a mile.

Moore sold a strip of his land along the river to the canal company in 1833 and Henry Phillips, owner of today's Howell Farm, was one of the witnesses to the deed. Amos Moore became quite wealthy and moved his residence to Lambertville. He owned several properties in



This sketch shows the original A-frame swing bridge across the canal looking north towards Lambertville. The station and milk platform are seen on the river side of the canal and the bridge tenders house and barn are on the land side.



This sketch shows the kingpost bridge that probably replaced the A frame sometime in the very early 1900s.

Lambertville, including the Lambertville House hotel, in addition to his farms in Pleasant Valley. He died in 1858 leaving the Lambertville House to his son Amos, a farm in Pleasant Valley to his son Gershom, and the farm at Moore's Station to son Stephen B. Moore. The Moore family name was also given to several geographic features associated with their lands. The creek that ran through Pleasant Valley and emptied into the Delaware River just north of Moore's Station was called Moore's Creek in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and retains the name today. Kuser Mountain, often known as Bald Pate Mountain, was also known as Moore's Mountain in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

A communication link such as a railroad station, even a whistle stop, could provide the impetus for a small community to develop. The tiny potential community at the canal bridge and railroad station took on the identity of a small town on some maps, and both the area as well as the station was sometimes known as Moore, New Jersey. The sign on the station simply read "Moore". However, no real economic center developed there, although the County Workhouse

farm just north of the station, purchased in 1892 from Levi B. Stout, and the quarry just south of it were identified as being at Moore's Station.

When Reuben Jones became bridge tender and station master in 1876 Stephen B. Moore still owned the Moore's Station farm. He died in 1877 and left the farm to his widow Sarah Ann Moore and his son, also named Stephen B. Moore. Sarah lived on the farm until her death in 1892 and young Stephen divided his time between the farm and Lambertville until his death from typhoid fever in 1902 at the age of 33. Tenant families actually worked the farm although living space was provided for Sarah and Stephen. Sarah, Stephen, and the various tenant families must have been well known neighbors to Reuben and his family. The family consisted of Reuben and his wife Adelaide, ten years his junior, and their six children. Thomas was born in 1855, Elijah in 1858, John in 1866, Charles in 1869, Albert in 1873, and Adelaide in 1877.

The house that Reuben and his family lived in at Moore's Station was built by the Delaware and Raritan Canal Company to house the employee who would open and close the bridge crossing the canal at the foot of Pleasant Valley Road. The bridge and lock tender houses built by the canal company were of several designs, some of stone and some of wood. The bridge tender's house at Moore's Station was identical to one built just up the canal at Valley Road. It was a simple, two story one room deep wooden structure with a central fireplace and chimney. We get a glimpse of the house in a newspaper report about repairs to the Reuben Jones house in June 1901. According to the *Herald* reporter, Rachel Williamson, improvements included a "new enclosure, new window and door casings, raising up the old kitchen to the height of the rest of the house and the building of a new kitchen, an extending porch in front of the part and making a door out toward the canal and railroad, which will be a great improvement." In the early years, the canal company whitewashed their houses each year and later painted them tan with brown trim. South of the house was a barn that was most likely used to store feed for the mules that pulled the canal barges and perhaps also to house mules. Canal maps show several other small buildings nearby, but their use is not indicated.

The railroad station was located on the river side of the canal just across the canal bridge. The building, which served as both station and freight house, was 12 by 36 ½ feet and was 12 feet high to the eaves. The exterior walls were vertical board and batten and the roof was tin with eaves overhanging four and a half feet. Extended eaves over the passenger platform were a trademark of the Bel-Del stations as a convenience to waiting passengers. The station house was ceiled inside, that is it was finished with interior planking, and heated by a coal burning stove. Coal for the stove was kept in a wooden storage box 12 feet long, 5 feet wide, and 4 feet deep located next to the station on the north side. A narrow wooden platform for passengers ran along the south end of the station and then a wider platform ran in front of and extended north of the station parallel to the track. A double track ran in front of the station. The front track was used by trains to pick up and discharge passengers and freight while the rear track was a 2.6 mile long siding that allowed north and south bound trains to pass.

Since the line was basically a one track system and had an increasing number of trains going both north and south, a system to coordinate the traffic and keep trains from colliding had to be developed. The system included switches and signals and also the use of telegraph stations along the route. One small telegraph station was built just south of Moore's Station at the point where the 2.6 mile siding rejoined the main track. A telephone line connecting Trenton and Lambertville was erected in the fall of 1898 and by 1910 poles carrying six telegraph wires and four telephone wires ran the length of the railroad to provide the link between these stations as well as the towns along the line. The station used the call letters MO and the small office was 13 ½ feet by 8 feet, constructed of wood with a slate roof. Inside were two sets of mechanical levers, three sets of telegraph instruments, one telephone, and a stove to warm the operator. Outside were a coal box and a four foot square wood outhouse with a tin roof. North of Moore's Station at the other end of the siding was a two foot by two foot by fifteen foot tall telephone box with one telephone.



The bridge tenders house at Moore's Station.

The system to coordinate the passing of trains did not always work, however, and there are several instances of train wrecks that resulted when the system broke down. One such collision occurred at Moore's Station in July 1873 when Reuben was living close to the station and just a couple of years before he became the station master. The *Hunterdon Republican* of Flemington reported on July 24, 1873,

On Saturday morning, about 3 o'clock, a collision between an empty and a loaded coal train took place on the Belvidere Delaware Railroad at Moore's Station, three miles below Lambertville. The engines came together with a crash. The cars were thrown off the track and down the embankment on either side and piled one upon the other, presenting a scene of great confusion. Fortunately nobody was hurt, but the damage to engines and cars was very great. In consequence of the wreck, all trains on the road were much delayed, and no trains reached Lambertville from below until afternoon. These repeated accidents on the Belvidere road are becoming serious in the loss which they entail on the Company. Both the locomotives were damaged, and an expense of several thousand dollars entailed on the Company. A coal train was wrecked at Titusville a few days previous to the above accident, and much delay and loss occasioned. A double track would probably remedy the difficulty to some extent.



Photograph of Moore's Station. While the date of the photo and why a large number of people are waiting for the train are not known, it is probably in the very early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The men and women are all dressed to visit so it may be they are waiting for a train to take them to the Inter-State Fair in Trenton or for some other excursion. There are no family groups with children so it may be a political event they are heading to. This photo is taken from near the river bank looking north-east.

Train wrecks were not the only hazard that Reuben and his family faced living at the bridge tender's house. In 1903, about two years after the updates to their house, an October storm caused record high water on the Delaware River that brought severe local flooding. The *Hopewell Herald* reported that Reuben's family, "moved everything off the first floor, but the water did not get in the house to do much damage. Their cellar was full and there was about two feet of water in their barn. About one o'clock Sunday morning the family was taken in a boat to the farmhouse on the Montgomery farm [the quarry], and before morning the water was within about ten feet of that." There was damage to the railroad and canal and south of Moore's Station "the canal bank on the river side gave away and undermined the railroad for about twenty rods." Bridges were also affected and "the Hutchinson canal bridge was greatly damaged. They had it roped or it would have left them. The one above, known as the Tom Good bridge, now lies in the canal below Moore's Station." The Italian quarry worker shanty town also suffered with several of the shanties being washed away and the "storehouse was carried some distance and turned over upon its side, and most of its contents destroyed."

Although the initial job of the bridge tender was just to swing open the bridge when necessary, the coming of the railroad and building of the station gave a new dimension to the job. Moore's Station was sometimes a regular stop on the Belvidere and Delaware Railroad, later the Belvidere Division of the Pennsylvania Railroad, commonly known as the Bel-Del. But, for much of its history trains only stopped if signaled to do so by someone wanting to depart the train or because a passenger or freight was present to be picked up. There was no ticket agent, so the bridge tender also took care of the station and assisted with freight transfers. Two newspaper briefs refer to this. On March 30, 1893 the *Hopewell Herald* reported that Reuben "fell one day last week while loading a car with crushed stone, cutting his face and bruising himself somewhat but not seriously." Several months later, on July 27 the paper reported, that a neighbor was on his way to Titusville when he met Reuben "carrying a large basket on his shoulder which seemed to be filled with something heavy, and remarked to him that he had a load. Yes said 'Rube,' it's dynamite for the stone quarry." The neighbor "said he suddenly remembered that he had urgent

business down the road and immediately gave him all the room he could." Caring for the station meant cleaning it and it is probable that Adelaide got down on her hands and knees to scrub it clean as her daughter did after Adelaide's death. Her daughter, also named Adelaide, was married to John Hutchinson at the house she was born in at Moore's Station and they lived with Reuben and Adelaide and continued to tend the bridge and station after the deaths of her parents. John also worked at the stone quarry operating the steam engine of the stone crusher and did odd jobs on Pleasant Valley farms, including work on the cupola on the barn at today's Howell Farm.

The crushed stone and dynamite are reminders that part of the Moore's Station area included the Montgomery stone quarry on Stephen B. Moore's land across the river road from the station. A rail spur to the quarry was built in 1898 and connected to the main line just north of Moore's Station. The *Herald* reported on March 23 that, "Work is progressing quite rapidly on the spur of the P.R.R. running from the main line in to the Montgomery quarry. We understand they expect to have the job completed early in April." The development of the stone quarry had several ramifications for Moore's Station. Crushed stone from the quarry, and several other quarries further north on the line, supplied grade ballast rock for the railroad when it was built and continued to be used to repair the rail bed. Several local men, such as Reuben's son-in-law John Hutchinson, worked in the quarry at specialized jobs such as steam driller. The quarry also needed skilled stone cutters and attracted a large number of Italian men. A shanty town grew up along river road and Pleasant Valley Road across from the station. In 1900 the 68 Italians making up this shanty town community were all males, many married but without their families, ranging in age from the twenties to the fifties. Some had immigrated to the United States as much as 18 years previously, but most had arrived within the past five years. Relations between the local farm families and the quarry workers were not always smooth. A story by Rachel Williamson in the *Hopewell Herald* for May 7, 1902 notes that:

Last Sunday morning as Mrs. Chas. Hunter and son, Wilmer, were returning from church, just above Moore's Station, on the Valley road, their horse became frightened at some clothing which the Italians had washed in the creek and placed on the bushes by the roadside to dry. The horse started down quite a steep embankment when Mrs. H. jumped from the buggy and called to Wilmer to jump out, but he very manfully hung on to the lines, when the horse stumbled and fell, breaking one of the shafts and leaving them stranded about two miles from home. Albert Phillips kindly took Mrs. Hunter in his carriage and carried her to her home, while Wilmer led the horse home, leaving the broken wagon by the roadside.

The story goes on to note that this was not an isolated incident and Mrs. Williamson noted it was "an every Sunday occurrence, as that is the day the Italians do their weekly wash. Now, if they must wash on the Sabbath day they should be compelled to hang their clothes farther away from the road before some more serious damage is done."

Moore's Station was critical to the farmers of Pleasant Valley as a way to get their farm produce to market. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries peaches were a prized local product and special trains were put on to collect peaches from farmers to take to market. In the 1890s similar trains picked up whole tomatoes or the canned tomatoes from the Titusville Fruit & Vegetable Canning Company where Pleasant Valley farmers took their crop. When dairying took on greater importance a milk train was added to the schedule beginning in December 1903 utilizing the milk platform that had been built in March. A plan of the station drawn in 1910-11 clearly shows the fourteen and a half foot long milk platform just across the road on the south side of the station. This platform can also be seen in the photo of the station. An earlier platform probably existed that was used for peaches and tomatoes.

Groups of people passed through Moore's Station taking advantage of opportunities offered by the railroad. The railroad ran excursion trains for special events such as the Interstate

Fair held each year in Trenton. The fair was "interstate" because it drew from both Pennsylvania and New Jersey and was a large agricultural fair complete with horse races, agricultural exhibits and competition, displays of new equipment, entertainment, etc. The Hopewell schools were given a day off for "children's day" at the Fair and the Bel-Del trains brought Pleasant Valley families from Moore's Station directly to the entrance to the fair grounds. Special trains also brought people down to Trenton for the circus each year and for special events such as the dedication of the Trenton Battle Monument in August 1893. Special excursion trains probably also took some Pleasant Valley residents to exhibitions such as the St. Louis Fair in 1904, the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876, and the Columbian Exhibition in Chicago in 1893.

The train provided a closer connection with Trenton for the country people of Pleasant Valley than when they relied solely on horse drawn vehicles. With Trenton less than an hour away, Trenton stores could advertise in the *Hopewell Herald* and attract customers from Pleasant Valley. Trenton newspapers were also taken out to the rural areas on midnight or early morning trains so the news was fresh. Sometimes the trains brought actual newsmakers to places where Pleasant Valley residents could see them. In May 1904 the Liberty Bell traveled the Bel-Del line on a special flatcar for an exhibition trip from Philadelphia to the St. Louis Fair. It stopped at major stations on the line and traveled slowly through other places, such as Moore's Station, so people could see it. It is not hard to imagine Reuben taking the opportunity to view the bell along with some Pleasant Valley people who came down to the station to do so.

During the time Reuben was station master several Presidents and candidates passed through Moore's Station on the way to a stop in Lambertville. In September 1896 William Jennings Bryan came through during a whistle stop Presidential campaign that had him stop for a speech at Lambertville. In November 1880 Rutherford B. Hayes passed through on his way to Easton to dedicate a building at Lafayette College. In November 1885 Grover Cleveland came through on his way to his home in Buffalo. He came through several times and also used the line to get to his favorite fishing places on the Delaware River.

Even though the station was just a small whistle stop in a large system, many people passed through it and most must have exchanged at least a few words with Reuben. Some Pleasant Valley people who came through were leaving the area for a new life in the west. One such person wrote a letter to the editor of the *Hopewell Herald* that was published June 20, 1889 in which he stated that although he had left several years earlier, "yet it seems but yesterday since I boarded the train at Moores" to move to Broken Bow, Nebraska. There are several references in the paper to people returning to visit friends and relatives in Pleasant Valley from the west and they came back by train to Moore's Station before heading back west from the same station. Other Pleasant Valley residents moved away, but not quite so far, and returned often. On May 13, 1908 the *Hopewell Herald* reported on the death of 88 year old Elias Lambert who had moved to Trenton to live with his daughter in his old age. As the paper reported, "He has been in the habit of returning to the old neighborhood to spend his birthday, which came on the Fourth of July, ever since he has resided in Trenton. He would frequently come on the train to Moore's Station and walk out to his nephew's, A.T. Hunt's, about 1 ½ miles, carrying a suit case and tripping along as spry as a school boy."

It was not uncommon for families to use the train to visit relatives as close as Lambertville, Titusville, or Washington Crossing, as well as Trenton. Several Pleasant Valley families made regular trips to Lambertville, or relatives from Lambertville came to visit them, by train. Sometimes they were met at the station and sometimes they walked from the station to their destinations. A wonderful example of this was recorded by Rachel Williamson in her column for the *Hopewell Herald*. Rachel and her husband Amos lived on Pleasant Valley Road about a half mile in from Moore's Station. On September 28, 1892 Rachel noted,

Last Wednesday morning we were taken by surprise by [our daughter] Mrs. M.T. Heath and daughters, of Lambertville, and fifteen of the neighbors, walking in from the half-past eight train. We were looking for Mrs. Heath and one Mrs. Wright, but

when we saw a whole picnic, you can better imagine than we can write what our thoughts were. House-wife fashion, the first thought was, "why, I have not enough prepared for so many;" but on further notice we saw that each one was cumbered with a basket; and as we are not so much given to worrying about such things as some house-keepers are, we decided to let that alone for the present. Well, they took possession, and in due time, after unpacking all those baskets, they spread a sumptuous dinner, of which all partook with a relish, as their walk out from the station and getting their own dinner had given them good appetites. We believe they all enjoyed the day, and we know we did, and hope they will come again. Some returned home on the 4:07 P.M. train, others stayed until the 5:49 train.

Reuben and Adelaide's children frequently visited each other or their parents by train. Sons John and Thomas and their families lived in Trenton, son Elijah and family lived at Washington Crossing and then Titusville, and son Albert took a job with the quarry company that took him north to near Bethlehem, Pennsylvania where he married and settled down as a quarry foreman at Raubeville, Pennsylvania. All these children and their families were frequent visitors to their parents at Moore's Station and Adelaide made a number of trips to visit them. The other two children, Charles and Adelaide, married and stayed in the Pleasant Valley area. Adelaide and her husband, John Hutchinson who worked at the quarry, lived with Reuben and Adelaide in the bridge tender's house. The family visits continued, even increased, after Reuben's death and on May 13, 1908 the paper noted, "Thomas Jones and wife of Trenton visited at his mother's home at Moore's Station on the 3<sup>rd</sup> inst. Coming unannounced they brought their dinner with them."

Friends and relatives passing through the station were not always on a happy visit. In July 1905 the death notice for Martha Parkhill, wife of John Parkhill of Pleasant Valley, noted that "relatives and friends of the family are invited to attend the service at her husband's residence, on Saturday afternoon at 2:30. Carriages will meet the 1:30 train at Moore's Station." Three months later in October the notice for the funeral of John Vannoy noted, "relatives and friends of the family are invited to attend the funeral from the residence of his son-in-law, August[us] Hunt, Pleasant Valley; on Wednesday at 10:30 at the house. ... Carriages will meet the 8:30 train at Moore's Station Wednesday morning."

When Reuben Jones died in 1907 undoubtedly friends and relatives came to Moore's Station and his funeral was held in the bridge tender's house. He was buried at the Titusville Methodist Church. He died at a time of transition for the canal and railroad. Over the next twenty years traffic on the canal and railroad decreased while use of automobiles, trucks, and buses increased. People of Pleasant Valley continued to use the train in the same ways they had during Reuben's time. In addition, at least one teacher at the Pleasant Valley school in the 1920s, Esther Rossiter, either rowed her boat to Moore's Station from the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware River or took a train north to New Hope, walked across the bridge to Lambertville, and then took the train south to Moore's Station. Either way, she then walked the mile to the school. Several Pleasant Valley children took the train each morning and evening to attend high school in the 1920s at Trenton or Lambertville. The station continued to be a gateway for the people of Pleasant Valley until the late 1920s and the coming of the Great Depression.

Records of the Pennsylvania Railroad show that as a cost saving measure in the early days of the Depression several smaller stations, including Moore's Station, were abandoned by April 1931. As was happening all over the United States, the convenience of the family automobile was replacing reliance on mass transportation as represented by the many stations on the Bel-Del line that had served the people of Pleasant Valley for just about 80 years. Today no trace of the station, bridge tenders house, barn, or other buildings exists to tell the story of this important little station that connected the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century people of Pleasant Valley to the outside world and enriched their lives in so many ways. But the story of Rueben Jones lives on in the memories of his descendants and the newspaper notices of Rachel Williamson in the *Hopewell Herald*.