

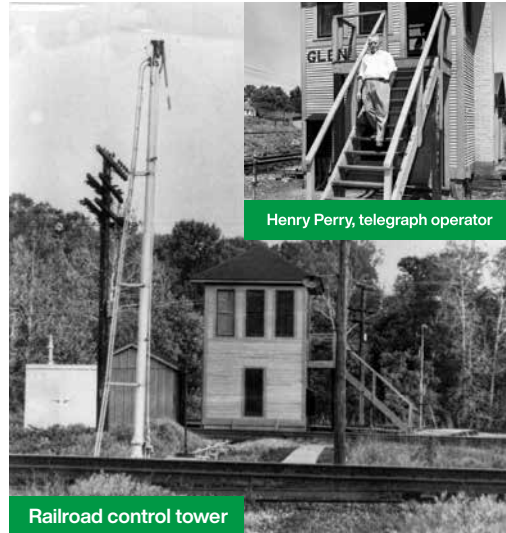
The Glen Carbon tower

was built about 1902. The control tower overseeing rail activities stood in the “vee” between the Nickel Plate and Illinois Central tracks on the south side of the junction. This gave tower operators a clear view of the junction in all directions. The control tower was manned 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and performed a function similar to a control tower at an airport.

The tower operator controlled train movements through the junction by remotely throwing the track switches to align various routes between tracks. He also remotely set the trackside signals. The combination of colored lights indicated to the locomotive engineer which route was aligned and safely locked for train movement. This gave the engineer the permission to move his train through the junction. The operator also communicated with the train dispatcher by telegraph or telephone, copying from the dispatcher onto paper forms the operational order for trains. These orders were handed to the train crews passing at speed using a special forked rod, generally known as a “train order hoop.” The orders were tautly tied on a string, waiting to be snatched by the crew of a passing train.

In the summer of 1904, passenger trains numbered 22 per day on their way to the World’s Fair in Forest Park, St. Louis. In addition, there were another dozen freight trains passing the tower every weekday.

Occasionally, there were major train wrecks near the control tower. One train was carrying a load of peaches coming from the east on the Illinois Central. The residents of Glen Carbon had a fruit treat that day!



Henry Perry, telegraph operator

Railroad control tower



1931 train wreck that destroyed the control tower



Train approaching control tower



1960 train wreck



Trail Info