

CUMBERLAND VALLEY RAILROAD MUSEUM



Railroad Signaling

Railroad signals are an essential part of a complex transportation network that allow for multiple trains to operate safely and efficiently on shared tracks. Signals date back to the birth of the industry itself and some basic design elements developed nearly two hundred years ago are still in use today.

Position Light

Beginning in 1915, the Pennsylvania Railroad used position lights such as this one to control train movements. The system of six lamps in a circle around a central lamp was intended to simulate an earlier system of semaphores that indicated stop, clear, and proceed with caution. The signal on the position light was determined by weak electrical currents running through the steel rails themselves that varied by whether or not another train was on them. The signal head on display was last used at the famous Horseshoe Curve near Altoona. It was donated by Norfolk Southern Corporation to the Conrail Historical Society. Funding for the restoration of the light was provided by Dr. Jim Freeman.

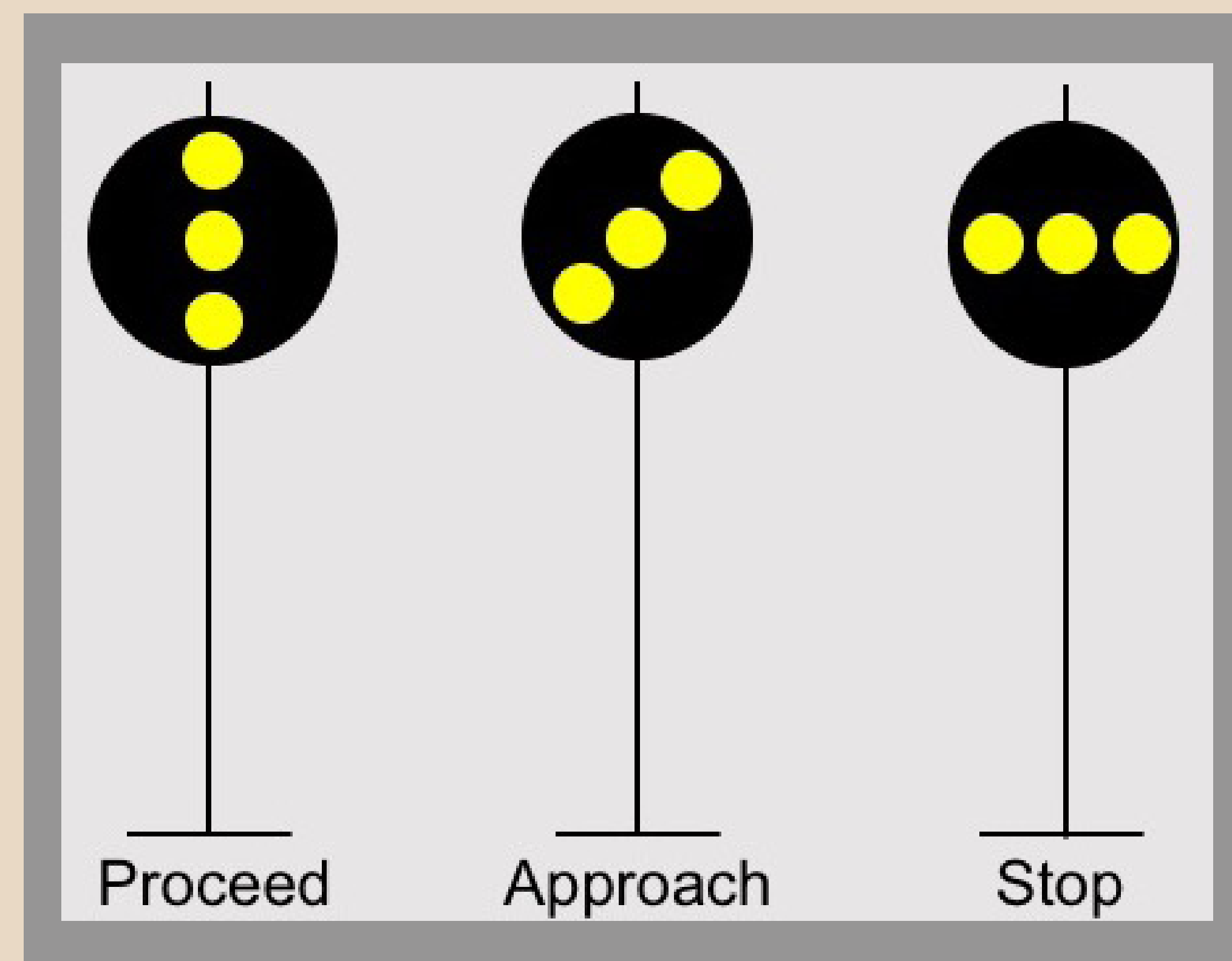


Signal Lines

This wires on either side of the track in this historical view facing north toward Old Main were used to transmit signals for the railroad companies and provided the ability for tower operators to remotely activate signals. The railroads would lease extra space on the poles to telegraph and later telephone companies. During the twentieth century, remotely activating switching equipment would gradually replace human operators. The large silver code box on display near the position light was originally located approximately a mile west of here near the interchange between the Reading Railroad and the Western Maryland Railroad.

Whistle Post

Whistle posts are among the earliest forms of railroad signaling and are still in use today. Wooden or metal posts were traditionally installed about one-quarter mile in advance of a public crossing. Upon reaching the post, engineers sound their horn for two long, one short, and another long whistle indicating that everyone should clear the road ahead. This original Cumberland Valley Railroad whistle post was donated by Samuel Leach and was used in the Mechanicsburg area.



Name plate from inside the silver code box that was installed by the Reading Railroad in 1947.

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Sign designed by Ashley Wilton Designs