

Gilmore Junction

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

Gilmore Junction is located along Southview Road near Venice at Trail Mile 21.5 and was the point where the Westland Branch diverged from the Montour Railroad main line.

When the railroad was originally constructed through Southview in 1913, the main line continued past this spot curving toward Venice and the bridge over Route 50 & 980. In 1922 a switch was installed on the main line and a spur constructed to service the Morris Mine about a half mile away. The Morris Mine was owned and operated by the Gilmore Coal Company, so the track junction became known as Gilmore Junction and the track to the mine was called the Midland Spur.

Five years later an additional four miles of track were added to reach the Pittsburgh Coal Company's Westland #1 Mine and the Midland Spur became known as the Westland Branch.

Gilmore Junction became a busy location as trains headed to or from coal mines to the east travelled the main line, while those going to Westland or Morris mines used the branch.



A string of empty hoppers heads out the Westland Branch, while a westbound train waits on the main line for the switch to clear. Gene P. Schaeffer photo.

As there was no signal at the junction, and the tracks were on curves limiting sight lines in each direction, a system was needed to control train speed and avoid collisions at the junction. Yard Limit signs were installed in each of the three directions of track a distance away from the junction. Under operating rules, while in a yard limit, train engineers must control their speed so that a train can be stopped in half the distance

that the engineer can visually see the track. Thus, if another train was occupying the junction switch, it could be stopped before a collision occurred.

One yard limit sign was about a quarter mile away near the Venice Bridge over Route 50 and is still in place. Another was a few hundred feet from the switch toward the overhead railroad bridge along Southview Road. The third was across Route 50 on the branch line near the Morris Mine.

Gilmore Junction was also the site of a metal tool house, used by the Montour track gangs. A speeder car was kept inside the shed, along with tools, spikes, track joiners and other materials needed to maintain the track. Spare ties and rails were stacked outside the shed. The doors faced the main line so the speeder car would be wheeled out and placed onto the track, then used to transport the men and materials to a work site. The tool house also had a stove to supply heat during the winter. The pavilion currently on the site uses the slab foundation from the tool house and the tracks for the speeder car can still be seen imbedded in the concrete.



Gilmore Junction in 1981 shows the tool house with the main line curving to the left and the Westland Branch to the right as it crosses Southview Road. Photo courtesy Tim Sposato.

Derailments would occasionally happen at the junction, often caused by the hopper cars “picking” the switch and climbing off the rails. Snow and ice buildup or a mis-set switch could cause the car wheels to go off the rails. When this happened, track gangs and recovery truck cranes would be quickly sent to the site to get the cars back on the track. Any such disruptions would block both the main line and the busy branch, shutting down the entire railroad through that area, so it was imperative to clear the blockage in a hurry.



Empty hoppers headed to Westland derail at the Gilmore Junction switch, March 1981. A truck crane has been called in to re-rail the cars. Gene P. Schaeffer photo.

After being abandoned for nearly 30 years, the Westland Branch was reconstructed in 2012 by MarkWest Energy to serve their newly built gas loading facility at the old Westland Mine site. Using a piece of the original Montour main line and the Westland Branch, a condition of a long-term lease by the energy company from the Montour Trail Council included building a trail along with the railroad. Thus the Westland Branch of the Trail again carries traffic, both on the rails and on the trail.

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