

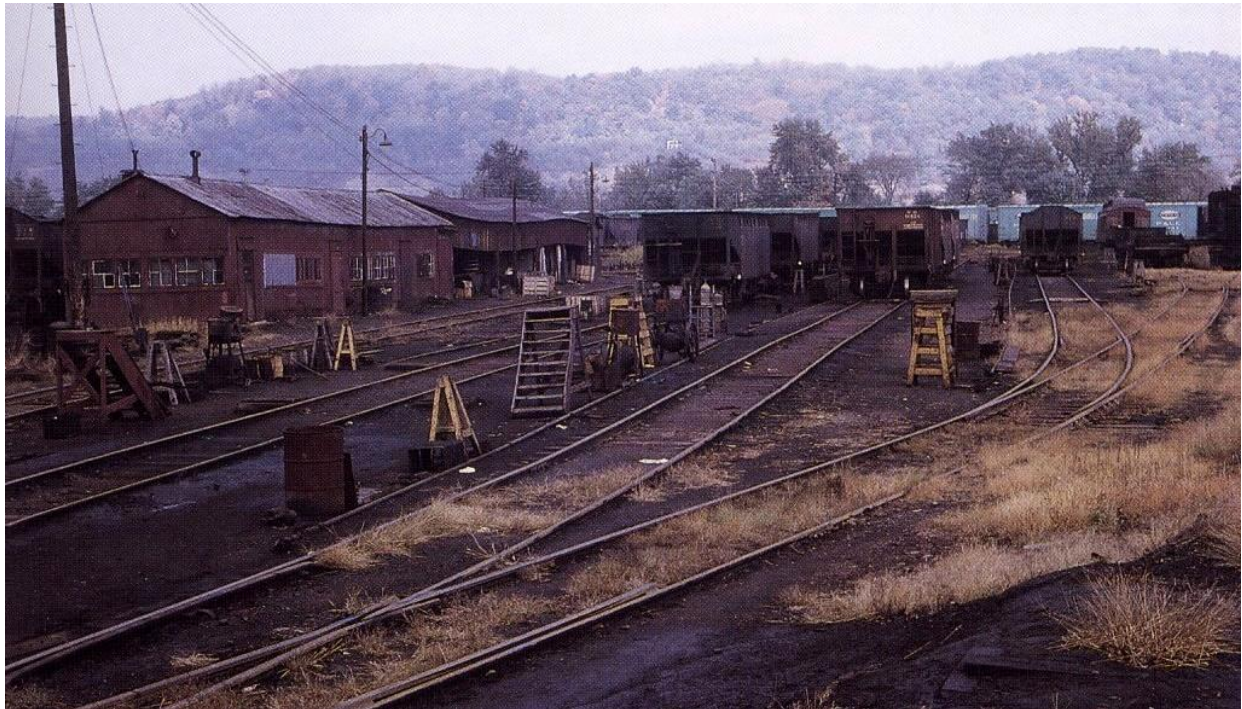
Montour Junction Car Shop

By Bryan Seip – President - Montour Railroad Historical Society

Hundreds of coal hoppers were used by the Montour Railroad to move coal from the mines to the Champion Preparation Plant for cleaning and processing.

These coal hoppers took a lot of abuse while being loaded and unloaded. The constant use wore them out, while rust ate away at the steel sides of the cars. At Champion, the cars were unloaded by a rotary dumper that turned them completely upside down. In the winters, coal would freeze in the cars and need to be chipped out or heated to unload it. The occasional derailment or accident dented and bent up the cars.

At Montour Junction, the car shop repaired and rebuilt the hoppers to give them new life and additional years of service on the railroad. If a car was too badly damaged to be repaired, it was cut up and scrapped.



Coal hoppers being repaired or rebuilt occupy the Car Shop tracks at Montour Junction in Coraopolis.

Fred Diebert photo

The car shop was an outdoor facility, using several tracks adjacent to the engine house, machine shop, carpentry shop and warehouse. Parts and materials were also stored in sheds along the shop tracks so the workers would have materials they needed

close at hand. Bolts, rivets, couplers, air brake lines and many other parts were constantly being replaced.

At times, hoppers would be rebuilt by replacing the entire steel side or end of the car. A crane would be used to hold a large shaped steel panel in place against the car's frame while corners, braces, top rims, ladders and grab bars were riveted or bolted into place. Broken drop doors and brake rigging were repaired or replaced. Wheel sets could be replaced if needed.



**The X1 crane unloads wheel sets at the Car Shop.
Charles A. Ross photo**

The cars were mostly black or a dark red primer color and covered in dirt and coal dust. Rusty rails and creosoted ties made up the shop area. The ground was black with coal, grease and oil. A dark smog often hung over the yard as coal smoke was held down by the wintry skies. Even falling snow soon acquired a dirty gray color. Welder's torches showered white hot sparks as they cut away damaged parts or welded patches into place. Several forges heated rivets to be used on the cars and their glowing red fires supplied the only color in this world of white, black and gray. Red hot rivets being tossed up to a waiting hopper would provide an arc of color. The constant

chatter of rivet guns and steel plates being slammed into place made this a noisy place to work. Communication was mostly by hand signals instead of talking.

The men who worked here were known as hard men. They worked out-of-doors in the hot summers and in the cold winters. It was a dirty and sweaty job using large, heavy tools. Covered with coal dust, dirt, rust, oil and grease, often only their white eyes would break up these dark silhouettes. Many of these men were immigrants and they did not take kindly to outsiders. New employees had to earn their way into the ranks of the shop gang and that wasn't easy to do. These neophytes might find their lunch bucket full of grease or perhaps welded to the washroom bench as a prank, but that was actually a sign that you were being accepted. If the shop gang didn't like you or your work ethic, they would simply run you off.

After cars were repaired and were again ready for service, they were pulled out of the shop tracks and sent back into revenue service on the main line, once again hauling the black diamonds that were the lifeblood of the Montour Railroad.

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