

Where Can A Locomotive Get A Drink?

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

From the 1880's into the 1950's steam locomotives ruled the Montour right-of-way and they were a thirsty lot. Needing places to replenish their tenders, water stations were spaced along the main line near coal mines and other locations where the locomotives often worked.

Clean water was needed to prevent scaling and rusting of boiler pipes on steam locomotives, thus a municipal supply or treated water was used in the tanks. Local water from streams or rivers held too many minerals and deposits from mine drainage to be used in the locomotive boilers.

Some of the water tank locations can still be spotted along the trail. They have four or more concrete footers for the tank legs, with another concrete square in the middle, where pipes fed in and out of the tank. Many Montour tanks fed a water column placed beside the tracks instead of the traditional tank spout.



Water columns similar to this one were used at several Montour locations rather than the more traditional tank spouts.

Photo courtesy CatskillArchives.com

Montour Junction (west of Trail mile 0): A water column sat beside the engine house bridge over Montour Run. The water came from both a municipal water supply and a well, so no tank was needed. Locomotives received water and sand at the engine house before moving to the coaling dock.

Imperial (Trail mile 8.5): The original terminus of the railroad in the 1880's, Imperial was home to the Montour's shops and engine servicing facilities until the Montour Junction complex was built in 1900.

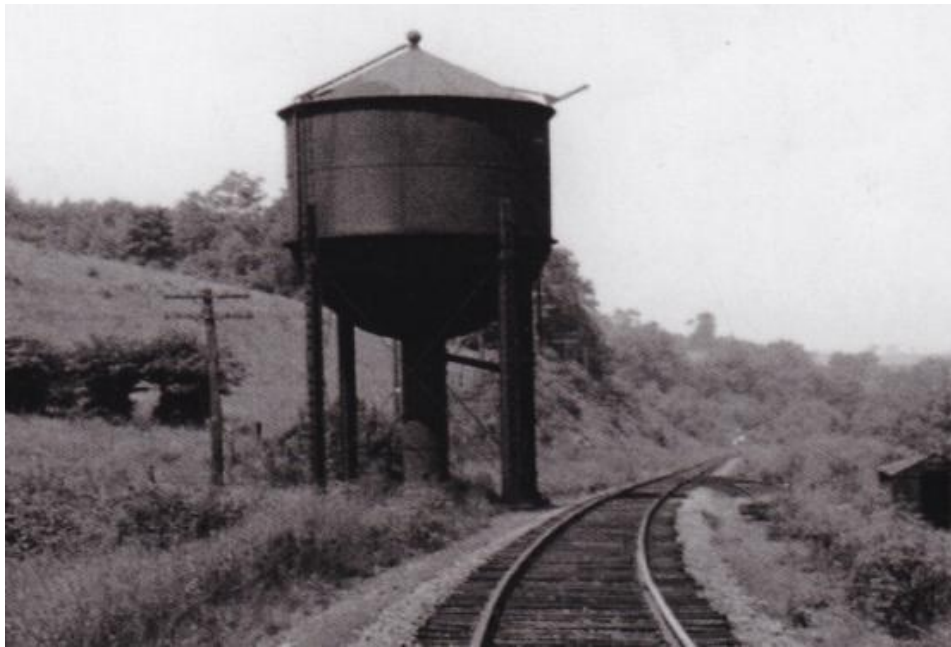
Champion (Trail mile 12.5): Locomotives working the Champion preparation plant needed water while they switched the plant. A water column using the plant's water supply was available at the loading tipple.

McDonald (Trail mile 17.3): Near the west end of McDonald Viaduct, this steel tank was 24 feet in diameter with a 60,000 gallon capacity and fed from municipal water. Four concrete footers for the tank legs can be found surrounding the Dick Quasey Memorial. This water station was established in 1923 to alleviate yearly water shortage problems at Southview.

Southview (Trail mile 20.6): A steel tank sat north of the intersection of Primrose & Southview roads. Concrete footers can be found in the ditch on the west side of the trail. A locomotive servicing facility at near-by Montour Mine #1 was also supplied from this tank via an underground pipe to a water column.

Hills (Trail mile 29.8): Concrete footers can be found on the hillside outside the curve near the Valley Brook Road bridge. A 16 foot cypress wood tank with 35,000 gallon capacity was installed in 1917. Water was supplied from the coal company's filtration plant along Chartiers Creek. Water from the tank was piped under the transfer tracks and main line to a water column on the inside of the curve.

Fife (Trail mile 31.5): Along the paved Arrowhead Trail, footers for the legs and central pipes can be found at the edge of the trail. This was a steel tank, as seen in the accompanying photo. Around 1917, a locomotive terminal using this water station was planned, but was never built.



Fife water tank stood along the main line in Peters Township. Concrete footers for the legs and center column can be found at the edge of the Trail at Mile 31.5.

Photo courtesy Gene P. Schaeffer collection

Library (Trail mile 36): A 10,000 gallon wooden tank built in 1921 was replaced by a 30,000 gallon steel tank with spout in 1931. Located behind the current Library Park & Ride lot, it sat beside the main line near the Montour #10 mine. It was used by locomotives switching the mine facilities and those travelling the Library Branch to Snowden.

Mifflin Junction in West Mifflin (not on the Trail): The eastern terminus of the Montour main line, where cars were interchanged with the Union RR, who also supplied a water column to service Montour locomotives.

By 1953, all the Montour's steam locomotives had been retired and diesel engines supplied the railroad's power. The water tanks along the line were subsequently retired and dismantled, leaving only their footprints to remind us of their history.

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