

Montour Railroad's Little Brother: The Pittsburgh & Moon Run Railroad

By Bob Ciminel - Montour Railroad Historical Society

Organized in 1891 and operational in 1893, the Pittsburgh & Moon Run Railroad (P&MR) was financed by the Moon Run Coal Company to service its new mine in Moon Run, located near today's Route 60, west of the I-79 interchange. The line originated in Groveton, east of Montour Junction, on the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie Railroad (now CSX).

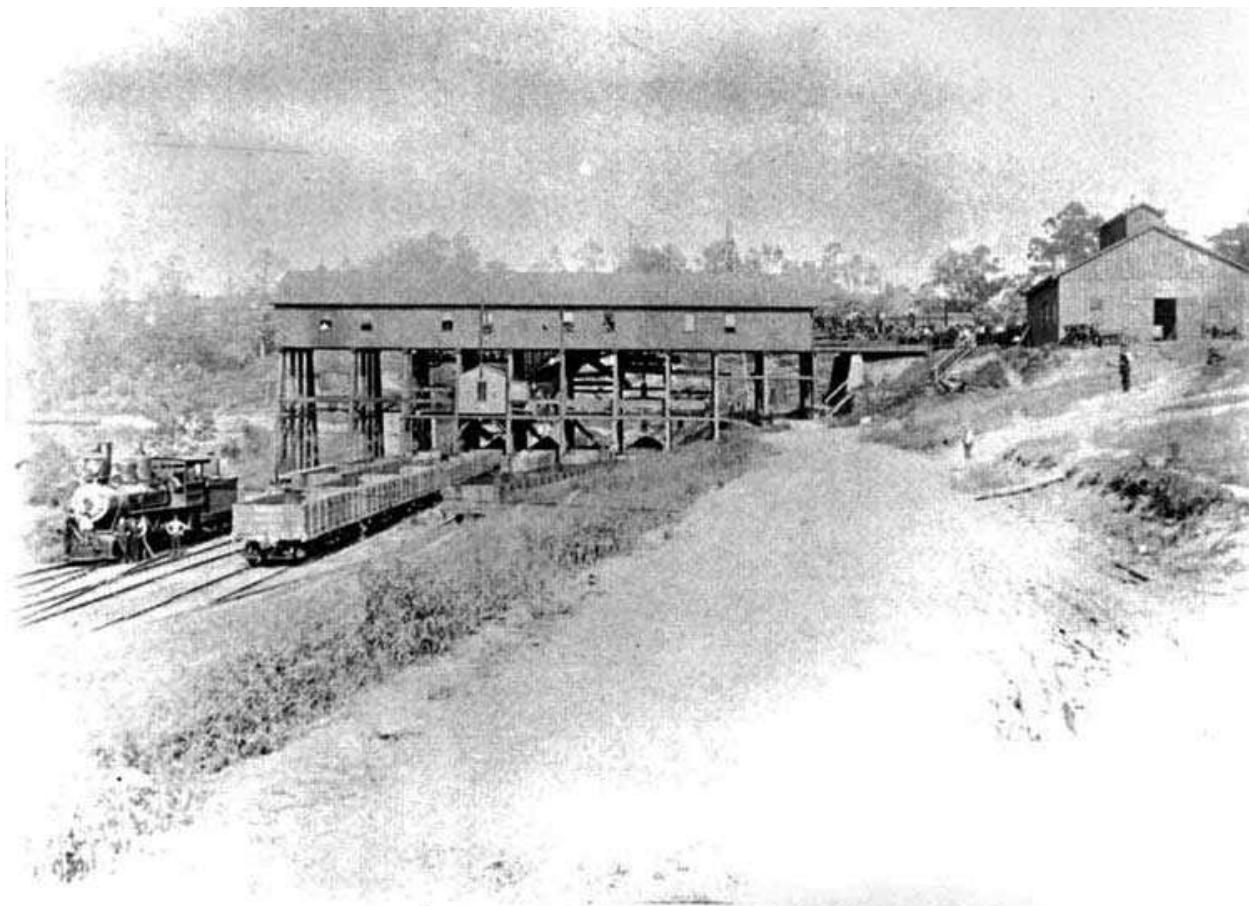
The P&MR began operation with one locomotive, one passenger car and six gondolas for hauling coal. Beside the Moon Run Mine, other stations along the track were used primarily for shipping farm products, although several small coal mines also operated along the right-of-way over the years.



As with most railroads organized in the 1800s, offering passenger service was a necessity to acquire a state franchise and as an incentive to property owners whose land the railroad needed. The P&MR was no different. Passenger service was offered between Pittsburgh and Moon Run on a daily except Sunday basis with six trains per day. The first train of the day departed Moon Run at 5:53 a.m., arriving in Pittsburgh

at the P&LE station (Station Square) at 6:45 a.m. The last train of the day left Pittsburgh at 3:30 p.m., arriving in Moon Run at 4:15 p.m.

In 1899, with the formation of the Pittsburgh Coal Company, both the Montour Railroad and the P&MR became subsidiaries of the Coal Company, along with the Moon Run Mine, which eventually became a major coal mining operation.



Moon Run Coal Tipple

In 1912, the Montour Railroad merged the P&MR, which continued operating as a subsidiary. The P&MR was a going concern until 1936 when its last customer, the Moon Run Mine, closed. The P&MR was abandoned three years later.

Little remains of the P&MR; however, remnants of the Moon Run Mine can still be seen in the form of waste dumps and scrap from the old tipple along McKees Rocks Road in Moon where many of the former miners' houses still exist. Portions of the southbound lanes of I-79 are located on the former P&MR right-of-way on the big "S" curve south of the Ohio River.

Some of the early stations going up the line, which were often named after the landowner who granted the right-of-way to the railroad, were Verner, Forrest Grove, Ficht, Debold, Clevers and Aiken. These former stations gave their names, sometimes

with different spelling, to Verner Road, Forest Grove Road, Diebold Road, Clever Road and Aiken Road.

Handling coal trains on the P&MR was a challenge for engineers, conductors and brakemen because the railroad rose 350 feet from the river to the Moon Run Mine, a grade of 70 feet per mile, or about 1.7%, and runaway trains were a constant danger.

So, each time you complain about those nasty curves on I-79, remember that the P&MR had to negotiate those same curves every day for over 40 years.

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