

Venice Bridge

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

Another major bridge nears completion on the Montour Trail. This one flies over Rts. 50 & 980 at Venice, Trail Mile 22.1. At 382 feet, it becomes the third longest on the trail. This new bridge also includes one span from the original Montour Railroad bridge at this location.

The original Venice Bridge was built over a century ago by the American Bridge Company in 1913. It was made up of three spans. A 60 foot deck plate girder spanned Millers Run creek, then a 40 foot deck plate girder crossed over the parking area next to an adjacent building known to many as "Muck's Lunch". The third span was a 90 foot through plate girder section over Rt. 50. The deck plate girder spans had timbers and rails laid openly across the top of their main girders, while the through plate span had its decking and rails supported between its girders.



A westbound Montour coal train crosses the bridge in 1980.

Gene P. Schaeffer photo

Rt. 980 came down the hill on the south & west side of the railroad to Rt. 50, jogged east under the bridge for a hundred feet and then turned north toward McDonald. This offset intersection was eliminated by the new alignment of the Rt. 50 & 980 intersection.

At 190 total feet, the Venice bridge was the fourth longest on the Montour Railroad. The west abutment, pier and span remain in their original locations, repurposed for use on the new bridge. Another pier at the side of Rt. 50 and the east abutment, which sat about where the new "T" shaped supporting pier is now located, were removed.

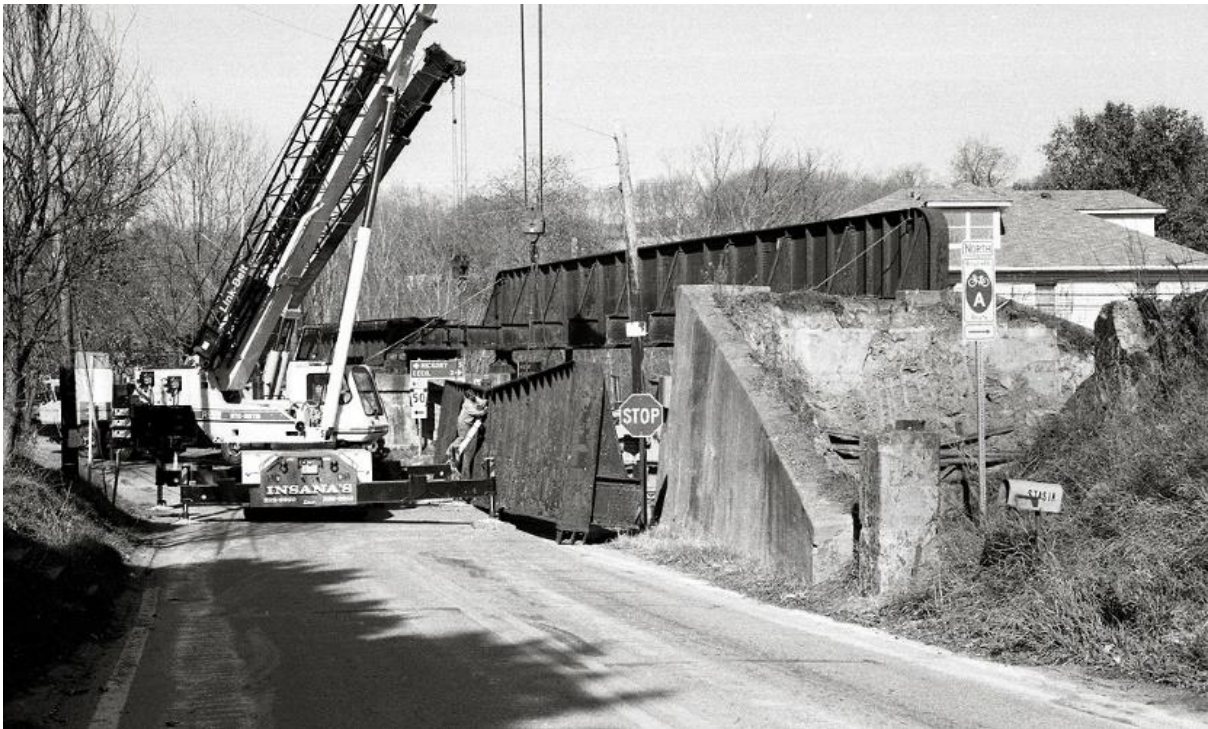
Montour Railroad traffic hauled loads in both directions over this bridge. Green (unprocessed) coal loads from Montour mines to the east at Muse, Hendersonville, Hills and Library travelled westbound to the Champion Processing Plant near Imperial. Processed coal from Champion returned eastbound to several interchange points for final shipment with other railroads. Empty hoppers mostly flowed eastbound to the mines. Non-coal freight went in both directions to and from many businesses in the area.



**Seen in 1993, the bridge sat idle after abandonment of the Montour Railroad.
Donald McCarty photo**

Montour Railroad operations ended over this section of track at the close of 1980. The Pittsburgh & Lake Erie RR, the Montour's parent company, applied for abandonment of ten miles of railroad from Gilmore Junction to Thompsonville (in Peters Township) in 1982. Portions of the main line and the Muse Branch to the east were then used to store surplus box cars for several years. In the winter of 1984, the last train passed over the Venice Bridge when the P&LE removed those stored cars. By 1986, the main rails had been removed from the bridge.

The bridge sat idle for over 15 years, but the restricted overhead clearance caused problems with truck traffic on Rt. 50. Trucks striking the bridge became a common occurrence. Thus, PennDOT had two of the three spans removed in October 2001 to clear the roadway problems. The east abutment and one pier were also razed and the railroad fill regraded to provide better traffic safety sightlines at the Rt. 980 intersection.



PennDOT removed two spans of the bridge in October 2001 to eliminate truck clearance restrictions.

Gene P. Schaeffer photo

During this period, the Montour Trail was a dead end at the west end of the bridge, as there was no way to get from the bridge height over Millers Run down to ground level, necessitating an on-road trail detour along Southview Road and Rt. 50. In 2010, the Trail Council undertook a project to eliminate the on-road portion by installing a set of wooden steps from the remaining bridge span down to ground level, using an at-grade crossing of Rt. 50 to a regraded trail ramp on the opposite side of the road.

PennDOT's recent realignment of the roadway intersection includes the new bridge to carry trail traffic over the roadways, increasing safety by eliminating the grade crossing. New piers and abutments were poured to support the "new" bridge, but its historic heart is its century old predecessor, still carrying Montour traffic over Millers Run.

This column appeared in the September-October, 2015 Montour Trail Newsletter.
For more information on the Montour Trail – go to www.montourtrail.org