

Car Loads of Coal

By Bob Ciminel - Montour Railroad Historical Society

At the time of its organization in 1878, the Imperial Coal Company operated two mines on the Montour Railroad, the Cliff Mine and the Montour Mine. Records are limited on how many coal cars the railroad had when it began operating, but Interstate Commerce Commission records show that these two mines loaded 1,142 cars in 1887 and 1,101 cars in 1888. At that time, the Montour was using wooden gondolas with capacities between 20 and 30 tons to move coal from the mines. By 1892, the Montour owned approximately 450 wood gondolas. The railroad did not begin purchasing steel gondolas until 1906 (pictured below), after it was taken over by the Pittsburgh Coal Company. Business must have been good because the Montour ordered 1,100 gondolas when it made the switch from wood to steel.



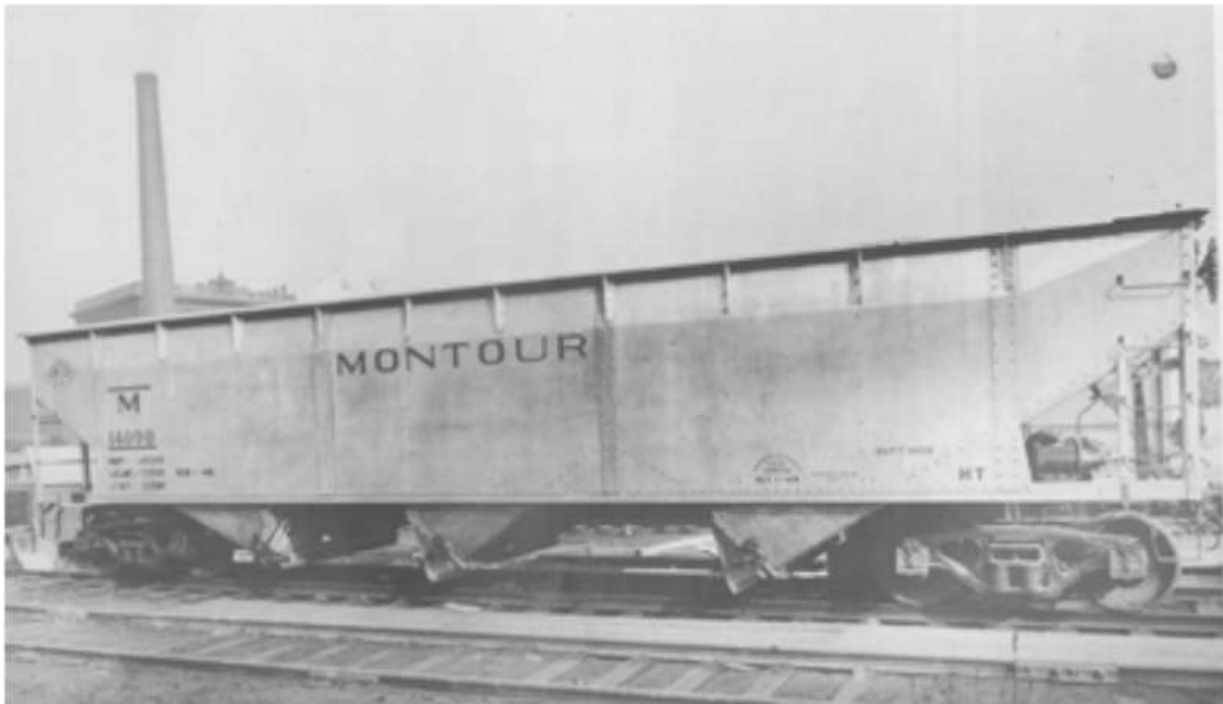
The first hopper cars came on the property when the Montour bought 70 used cars built in 1902 for the Erie Railroad from Briggs & Turivas. B&T was a large railroad scrap dealer headquartered in Chicago that also did a sizeable amount of business in used cars and locomotives. Around 1928, B&T opened a scrap yard and storage facility on the Montour Railroad at Lotus Siding near the Montour Interchange on Route 60. (The April 1928 issue of the Pittsburgh Railroad Club proceedings contained an advertisement announcing the opening of B&T's new location at Imperial.) By 1912, Montour's car population had grown to 2,345 cars with an average capacity of about 40 tons.

The Montour began purchasing used hopper cars from other railroads after World War I, and also ordered new cars from the Standard Steel Car Company in Pittsburgh (1,000 cars) and the Pullman-Standard Car Company in Butler (800 cars). The preference for used and rebuilt cars continued throughout the Montour's existence. Used cars came from the Washington, Baltimore & Annapolis Electric Railroad (30 cars), the Bethlehem Mines Corporation (150 cars), the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad

(100 cars) and the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie Railway (200 cars). Interestingly, there is no record of any cars being purchased from the Pennsylvania Railroad, which was a part owner of the Montour after 1945. However, 100 cars in the 17000-17499 series, built by Pullman-Standard in 1937, were re-painted in red to reflect the PRR heritage sometime after 1946. (Pittsburgh Coal Company sold the Montour Railroad to the PRR and P&LE in 1946.)



The Montour did have some unique cars in its inventory through the years. Two hopper cars built by Standard Steel Car Company in 1937 were painted solid white in 1938. During World War II, 100 hopper cars had the slogan Coal Goes to War applied to their sides in support of the war effort. Hopper car 14000 (pictured below) was a 70-ton capacity aluminum car built by Alcoa that was used in shuttle service between the mines and the Champion coal washer. This car operated on the Montour between 1946 and 1975.



Our series of historical articles in the Montour Trail Newsletter has continued to emphasize that the Montour Railroad existed because of the billions of tons of Pittsburgh Seam coal that rested beneath the rolling hills and valleys of southwestern Pennsylvania. The data are staggering when you consider that the Montour and its subsidiary, the Pittsburgh & Moon Run Railroad, owned approximately 4,700 gondolas and 3,240 hopper cars, with an aggregate capacity of 287,000 tons of coal, during their 103-year lifetime. The effects of the takeover by the Pittsburgh Coal Company in 1899 and World Wars I (1914-1918) and II (1941-1945) are also evident when you consider that during its 22-years under the ownership of the Imperial Coal Company (1878-1899) the Montour had only 336 cars, but purchased 6,200 cars over the next 45 years.

(Photos from *The Montour Railroad* by Gene P. Schaeffer)

This column appeared in the September-October, 2011 Montour Trail Newsletter.
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