

The Junkyard

By Bob Ciminel - Montour Railroad Historical Society

You would never know it today, but the two buildings nestled between the Montour Trail and Cliff Mine Road at the Montour Exit on the Penn-Lincoln Parkway are located on what used to be a railroad scrap yard operated by the Briggs & Turivas Company, a railroad equipment dealer and steel producer headquartered in Chicago.

B&T opened its new scrap yard on the Montour in the 1920s at Lotus Station, between Scott Siding and Cliff Mine Siding (Trail Milepost 5.5). Many of the original coal cars on the Montour Railroad and other equipment were purchased from B&T, and it was an active shipper and receiver on the Montour, with derelict cars coming in and refurbished cars going out.



This is an aerial photograph of the B&T scrapyard taken in 1973.
Photo courtesy of Greg Corcoran (©2012)

Besides its scrapping operations, B&T also repaired and sold rail equipment to other railroads, as well as industrial and commercial enterprises. Purchasing reconditioned railroad equipment was an inexpensive option in times of tight money. In most cases, car bodies were replaced or repaired, brake riggings inspected, new springs, axles and wheels installed, couplers and draft gear replaced, and a new paint job were all that were needed to produce a car that could run for another 20 years.

With B&T located on the Montour main track, the company had multiple shipping options available. Cars could be interchanged with the following railroads along the Montour and its branches:

- Pittsburgh & Lake Erie Railroad at Montour Junction
- Pittsburgh & West Virginia Railway at Southview and Salida
- Pennsylvania Railroad at McDonald, Hills and Penmont
- Union Railroad and the Bessemer & Lake Erie Railroad at Mifflin Junction
- B&O Railroad at Snowden.

The B&T scrapyard was in operation until 1977, but was closed as the Montour approached abandonment. The Montour's X-1 railroad crane, located along the Trail at the former site of Montour No. 4 mine at Hills, was sold to B&T as part of the railroad's shutdown. The crane eventually ended up in Dennison, Ohio when B&T terminated its operations on the Montour.

Former Montour Railroad employee Gene P. Schaeffer provides a short synopsis of the final days of the B&T scrapyard:

"During June & July 1977 B&T began shipping their cranes out. I remember the B&T crane that was painted Red, White & Blue for the Bicentennial kept derailing en route to McDonald. I was working Section Gang #1 but wasn't able to take any photos of the cranes moving. However, crane "B&T" #76 on June 10, 1977, derailed on McDonald Transfer. It had to go back to B&T for work and on June 16, 1977 it again derailed on the main track at the East end of Boggs. Then in July 6, 1977, B&T cranes #7003 and #1776 derailed at Champion with a notation in the derailment ledger "not enough weight on front of crane with the boom disconnected".

Many would agree that the old B&T scrapyard looks much better now than it did in those halcyon days when the Montour was an operating railroad, and many others (myself included) would say all things have beauty in them, even junkyards; you simply have to look for it, as illustrated by this 1975 photograph by Gene Schaeffer.



Photo by Gene P. Schaeffer (©2012)

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