

Bethel Park and On To Mifflin

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

As you head into Bethel Park on the Montour Trail, you will come to the end of the trail at Logan Road. This section of the trail was actually the main line of the Montour Railroad. It was built in 1914 as the Mifflin Extension and did not stop at the current trail's end.

The railroad travelled three miles further across Bethel Park to serve several local businesses and make a connection with the Pittsburgh & West Virginia Railroad (later Norfolk & Western) near Longview at Baptist Road. The Montour also held trackage rights (meaning they could operate Montour trains over tracks owned by another railroad) over several more miles of P&WV tracks to reach Mifflin Junction in West Mifflin. This was an interchange point with the Union Railroad and subsequently the Bessemer & Lake Erie Railroad. The B&LE supplied empty hopper cars to the Montour to be loaded at local mines and after 1928 at the Champion Preparation Plant. The loaded cars were returned to Mifflin Junction and then forwarded north by the Bessemer to shipping ports on Lake Erie.

Several local businesses in Bethel Park received freight shipments via the Montour. The biggest customer was Brookside Lumber on Logan Road. Brookside received car loads of lumber and materials used in the construction of housing that filled Bethel Park real estate. Brookside was the last Montour rail customer in Bethel Park, with shipments ending in December, 1980.



One of the last trains to Brookside Lumber crosses over Logan Road in December 1980. The concrete arch bridge was demolished in 1987. Tim Sposato photo.

Between Brookside Lumber and South Park Road was the Pittsburgh Terminal Mine #8 at Coverdale, in the area that the Industrial Park currently occupies. This mine was serviced by the Wabash Pittsburgh Terminal/West Side Belt Railroad via trackage rights on Montour rails to ship the coal mined at Coverdale.

Crossing South Park Road, the Montour had spur tracks on either side of Brightwood Road near the Bethel Park municipal building, at Kiefer Supply and Slater's lumber yard. A short distance further at Rt. 88 was the Allegheny County road maintenance garage, known as ALLECO, which also received shipments from the railroad.



Three engines and a caboose cross over Library Avenue, the PAT trolley tracks and Brightwood Road near the Bethel Park municipal building. Gene P. Schaeffer photo.

Continuing east, the Montour went under Broughton Road, across Horning Road and over Baptist Road to Salida, the connection with the P&WV. A siding was located at Salida, where cars coming to or from Mifflin Junction or Longview could be set out for interchange between the two railroads.

At Mifflin Junction, the Montour leased 13 acres from the Union Railroad in 1914 and built a coaling station for steam locomotives, a station including a scale, storage and repair tracks and several houses which were used as employee dwellings. Coal loads delivered at Mifflin would be weighed on the scale before being delivered to the forwarding railroads for final shipment.

Crews travelling to Mifflin in the steam era would often reach the end of their permitted work hours and would need to stay overnight, using the company supplied housing. By the 1940's, new highways in the area allowed train crews to be able to drive back to their homes for the night instead of staying in Mifflin. Even though their work day ended

and they technically laid over at Mifflin, some crew members kept an old car at the facility so they could drive home for the night and then report back to Mifflin Junction the next morning.

By the mid-1970's, the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie RR completely owned the Montour Railroad. P&LE decided to reroute the hundreds of Bessemer hoppers over their own rails to Montour Junction in Coraopolis. This resulted in the discontinuance of the Montour's Salida interchange, severing the east end of the railroad. The last Montour train used the section of track between Salida and Brightwood Road in April, 1976 and abandonment was completed in October, 1978.



The bridge carrying the Montour main line and siding over the N&W railroad near Baptist Road is removed June, 1981. Gene P. Schaeffer photo.

In December, 1979 the P&LE applied for abandonment of an additional 8.4 miles of track between Brightwood Road and the Thompsonville siding in Peters Township, and also the 5.9 miles of the Library Branch. A one-year notice was required for abandonment to proceed and the final train to Brookside Lumber operated on December 26, 1980 to remove several empty cars from Brookside, thus ending Montour operations in the Bethel Park area.

In the 1980's and 90's seven Montour Railroad bridges in Bethel Park were demolished or removed along the section of right-of-way between Logan and Baptist Roads. The right-of-way was sold or taken over for other purposes.

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