

## Thompsonville – Fife - McMurray

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

The Montour Railroad was constructed through Peters Township in 1913-14. After the railroad was abandoned, the township acquired the property containing the railroad right-of-way in 1985 with the plan to convert it to a recreational multi-use trail. A 3.5 mile section from Rt. 19 looping around to Brush Run Road was paved and designated as the Arrowhead Trail. The remaining three sections leading to the boundary of the township were later opened and are maintained by the Montour Trail Council in an agreement with the township.

On the main line at trail mile 30.6, just east of the through-plate girder bridge near Rt. 19, was the west switch of Thompsonville Siding. It was near the end of the current parking lot behind the St. Petersburg Center. This siding track ran east for about 3,400 feet and could hold 68 cars. A commercial spur came off the siding at the Rt. 19 end to service Easton Lumber, whose buildings now make up the St. Petersburg Center shops. This spur ran along the edge of the current parking area.

Thompsonville siding was used to hold empty hoppers destined for loading at the nearby Montour Mine #4 when the mine yard was filled and extra cars were pulled off the Hills Transfer track. It could also be used to hold loaded hoppers from the mine when additional space was needed or for coal loads going east to Mifflin Junction. Railroad telephone booths at each end of the siding allowed train conductors to communicate with the Montour dispatcher regarding train movements before radios came into use in the early 1970's.



The double width bridge at Pelipetz Road shows a train eastbound on the main line and Thompsonville Siding to the right. Gene P. Schaeffer photo taken November, 1980.

The double track arrangement of main and siding can be seen in the bridge at the Pelipetz Road trailhead parking area. It is a double width bridge to hold the two tracks. Several hundred yards east of the Pelipetz trailhead was the east end siding switch. It was just about opposite the small block building located along Valley Brook Road. This building was the Hickman Fan, the head of a ventilation shaft coming from Montour Mine #4 below ground.

A few hundred yards further along the trail was the area known as Fife. A large steel water tank was erected along the main line track and its concrete footings can still be found beside the south edge of the trail near several benches. In 1917 there was a plan to build an engine service facility at the tank, but this plan never came to fruition.



**The steel Fife water tank sits beside the main line in the 1920's. Concrete footers for the four legs and the central column can be found near the edge of the trail. Photo from Gene P. Schaeffer Collection.**

After crossing over McMurray Road, another commercial spur came off the main line to serve McMurray Supply with lumber and coal deliveries. Coal was loaded into trucks for sale and delivery to local homes. This business was located where the Cob Collection and next door office buildings are now in use. An east facing switch near the end of the current office parking area led to a 495 foot long spur which could hold 8 cars.

Next to the trail, near the Bebout Road bridge, is a brick house that was originally built for a farm in the early 1900's. It was purchased by the Montour Railroad about 1917 to house the local section foreman and his family. A tool shed was located across the trail from the house. It held tools, spikes and track supplies as well as a speeder car for the section gang to use. Its concrete slab foundation can still be found near the stairs coming up from the Valley Brook Road parking lot.

The paved Arrowhead Trail follows the original Montour main line to Brush Run Road, but the main trail diverges at Library Junction behind the horse farm and continues down the hill on what was the railroad's Library Branch.

**This column appeared in the March-April, 2019 Montour Trail Newsletter.  
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