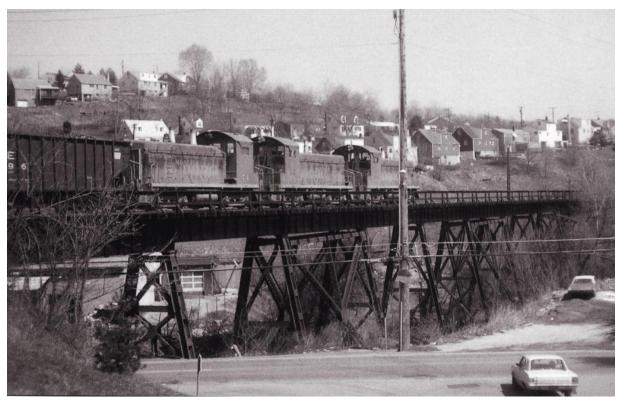# Library Viaduct – 100th Anniversary

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

One of the signature sights on the Montour Railroad and the current trail is the Library Viaduct, which is now a century old. At 506 feet, it was the second longest bridge on the railroad. Only the McDonald Viaduct was longer.

In 1918, the Montour Railroad started construction of a two mile segment of track, leaving the main line at the Milton Douglas farm in Peters Township (now the Empress Arabian horse farm). This track ran to the site of the Pittsburgh Coal Company's Montour Mine #10 along Brownsville Road in Library. To cross over the Piney Fork Creek valley at the bottom of the hill, which included Rt. 88 and interurban trolley tracks, a long bridge was needed.

This 1973 view shows Montour locomotives shoving a coal train over the viaduct. Houses along Helen Street are in the background. Gene P. Schaeffer photo.

The Library Viaduct consists of eleven spans, supported by ten bents, or vertical steel beam columns. It was erected in 1919 by the American Bridge Company. The spans were deck plate girders, with a timber deck. A deck plate bridge has its main girders built as large rectangular steel plates, with the decking resting entirely on top of the girders. Wooden deck timbers, which look like oversized railroad ties, supported the rails on the bridge. The viaduct had a safety walkway along its length and the sections over Rt. 88 and the trolley tracks were planked over and had chain link fencing attached

to side railings to keep any chunks of coal that might fall off the loaded hoppers from dropping onto the traffic below.

A view out the door of a Montour caboose leading a train across the viaduct in 1975 shows the safety walkway on the right side.   Gene P. Schaeffer photo.

While most bridges on the Montour Railroad had a single builder's plate affixed to the bridge, the Library Viaduct has four builder's plates facing over the road and the trolley line, a bit of century old advertising.

The last train over the viaduct ran in October, 1978. It was officially abandoned in 1979, along with the railroad's entire Library Branch to Snowden, and afterward the bridge sat idle for over 35 years.

The Montour Trail Council acquired the railroad right-of-way and started planning for its rehabilitation to open this missing segment along the Library section of the trail. The detour along Rt. 88 and Brownsville Road was a dangerous transition to reach the continuation of the trail near Stewart Road. Work was started in the spring of 2014 as trail volunteers cleared out the brush and trees growing under the bridge and contractors started dismantling the rails and timber bridge deck. A new concrete deck was poured, guard rails and fencing added and the bridge was opened to trail traffic in April, 2015. Additional construction was needed along the trail segment connecting the viaduct with Pleasant Street, with completion and the official trail dedication of the viaduct and trail segment occurring in the spring of 2017.

Coming down the steep grade from Library Junction, the viaduct was the first bridge on the Library Branch. After crossing the valley and curving behind the old school building, the railroad crossed over Pleasant Street and into the Montour Mine #10 complex.

Steam engines were an impressive sight as they ventured out onto the tall, narrow bridge hauling a string of coal hoppers going to or from the mine.

In the final years of rail operations over the viaduct, rail cars were shoved ahead of the locomotives due to the poor condition of the roadbed on the branch. Thus the first view of a train shoving out onto the viaduct would be the caboose leading the way with the conductor standing on its platform acting as the eyes of the move.

The Montour Trail now uses the Library Branch line as its main trail, connecting with the Great Allegheny Passage trails at Clairton.