

Montour Memories

Jim Lane and the Widow's House

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

Jim Lane was a long-time engineer on the Montour Railroad, signing on as a fireman in 1936, moving up to engineer and working until his retirement in 1976. He was one of four Lane men who worked on the Montour. His brother, son and nephew all became Montour engineers. They all lived in the area at the bottom of the hill at Lawrence, known as Hills Station – or simply Hills – to the railroaders.

“Big Jim” loved the Montour and had plenty of stories to tell about his time on the Mighty M. He told this story about helping a neighbor who lived next to the railroad. It is called The Widow's House.



Jim Lane in the engineer's seat of a Montour steam locomotive.
Photo courtesy Nick Jarina.

Jim was working as a fireman in the late 1930's on a run late one winter evening out of Montour Junction. He thought it might have been locomotive #33.

As they headed east, they passed through Greers Tunnel, over the Pennsylvania Railroad on the through truss bridge and around several curves in that area. Here they exploded a track torpedo used for signaling an obstruction ahead.

They slowed down and caught sight of a flagman giving them a stop signal with a red lantern. The flagman climbed aboard as the engineer eased down to a stop behind the flagman's caboose. After Jim's train stopped, the flagman said that his train ahead of them was having air trouble with a pick up off the PRR transfer at Hills, but expected they would be moving east shortly.

At this point they had stopped on a short straight stretch east of Greers Crossing above what later became the water purification plant for #4 mine along Chartiers Creek. (This is at trail mile 29.2, east of Linwood Road where the wide grassy patch sits along the trail.) This was also next to an old frame and log dwelling belonging to an old widow woman. Her husband had been a miner all his life, but had passed away.

Jim said that every day the miner used to walk to work, using either the Montour or the PRR that crossed the creek at this same point, depending if he worked at the tipple or entered the mine at the supply yard along the PRR.

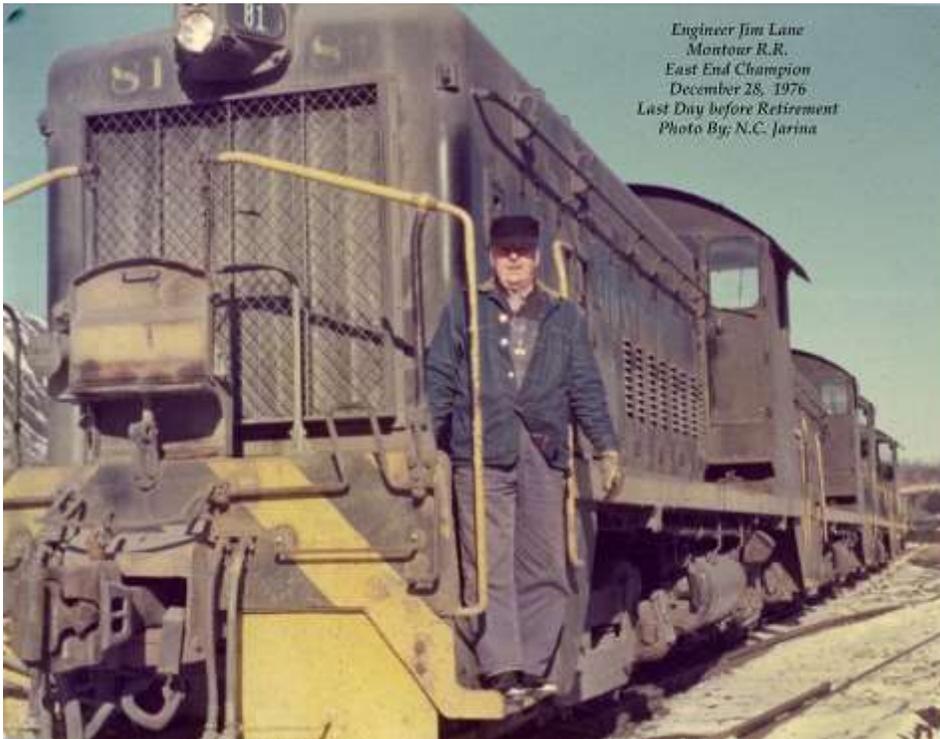
Jim, living near-by in Hills Station and knowing all his neighbors, decided to toss some coal out from the tender into her front yard. He said he had tossed coal as he passed by on moving trains before, usually a shovel full or two if he was quick enough. After he supplied her yard that night, he climbed down into the cab and was confronted by the Montour's trainmaster. It seems the trainmaster had been lurking around the train stopped in front of them and walked back for a visit. He asked Jim what he had been doing on the tender and Jim replied he was shoving coal closer to the bunker doors and trimming the loose coal so it would not fall from the top of the tender.

Well, the trainmaster knew the real story and wondered why he saw coal landing in the widow's yard. No reply from Jim would have changed the verdict.

The trainmaster reported Jim's conduct and disciplinary actions were given in terms of more "brownies" to Jim's record, (brownies were days without work or pay) but the coal remained on the ground for the widow.

I guess the trainmaster may have had a soft spot himself.

Standing at the site, you can easily imagine the scene of locomotive #33 sitting there, shrouded in steam on a cold evening with its headlight illuminating a wooden caboose, and the silhouette of Jim Lane against the night sky making sure the old widow woman would be warm for another night.



**Jim Lane working at Champion on his last day before retirement, December 28, 1976.
Nick Jarina photo.**



Jim Lane on engine #81 in 1974. Photo courtesy Tim Sposato.

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