

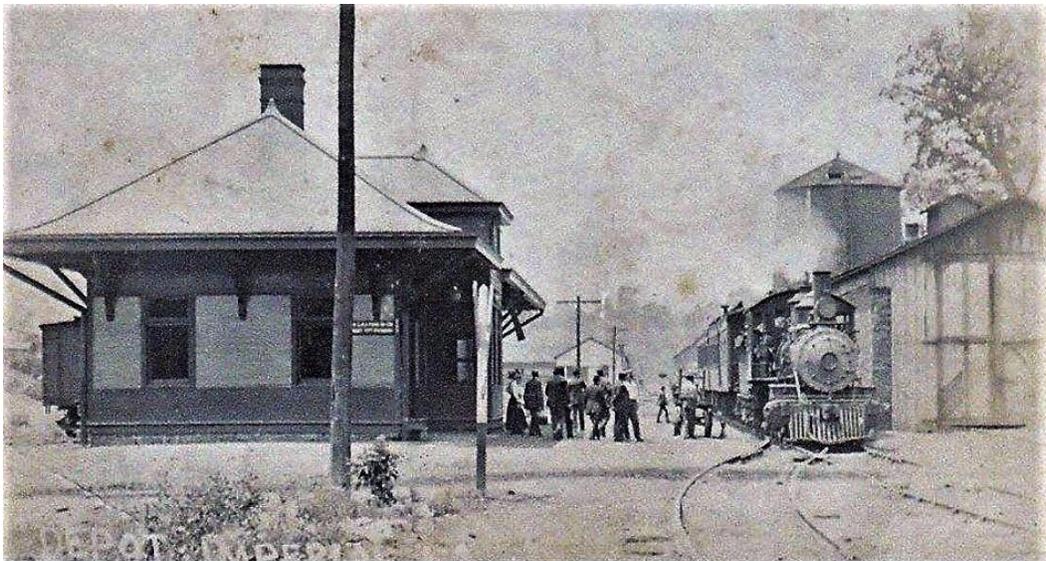
Imperial and the Montour Railroad

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

An important location on the Montour Railroad, especially in its early operating years, was the town of Imperial. The Imperial Coal Company was the founding owner of the Montour Railroad in 1877. The railroad's original tracks ran from Coraopolis to Guy's Mill, about five miles up Montour Run.

The North Fayette Railroad Company was formed August 1, 1878, to extend the railroad from Guy's Mill to the town of Imperial. Before any business or construction began, in September 1878 the North Fayette Railroad was merged into the Montour Railroad.

A terminal facility with a stone engine house, water tower and other facilities were built at Imperial to service the Montour locomotives. These facilities were nicknamed "Montour City", located near the sites of Valley Presbyterian Church and the current Findlay Township Activity Center. Tracks were run to the nearby Margerum Mine, which had a tipple located near the current St. Columbkille Church site. This is where the locomotives took on their coal loads. October 1879 saw the main line tracks extended two miles further south to the new Partridge Mine.



A Montour passenger train stops at the station in Imperial. The water tower and maintenance facilities are to the right of the tracks.

In 1899 the Pittsburgh Coal Company was formed with the purpose of buying and consolidating over 75 coal companies operating in southwestern Pennsylvania and Maryland. These acquisitions included the Imperial Coal Company and the Moon Run Coal Company, which held all capital stock of the Montour and the Pittsburgh & Moon Run Railroads. In anticipation of increased coal traffic and thus a need of larger

locomotives, Pittsburgh Coal built a large shops facility at Montour Junction in Coraopolis. It opened in 1900, and the terminal facilities at Imperial were shut down.

The North Star and Mifflin Railroad was formed in October 1912 to extend the Montour from Imperial to a connection with the Union Railroad at Mifflin Junction, establishing access to several new mines being opened in the Pittsburgh South Hills. By the end of the year, the North Star and Mifflin was merged into the Montour Railroad. The new extension began railroad operations in 1914.

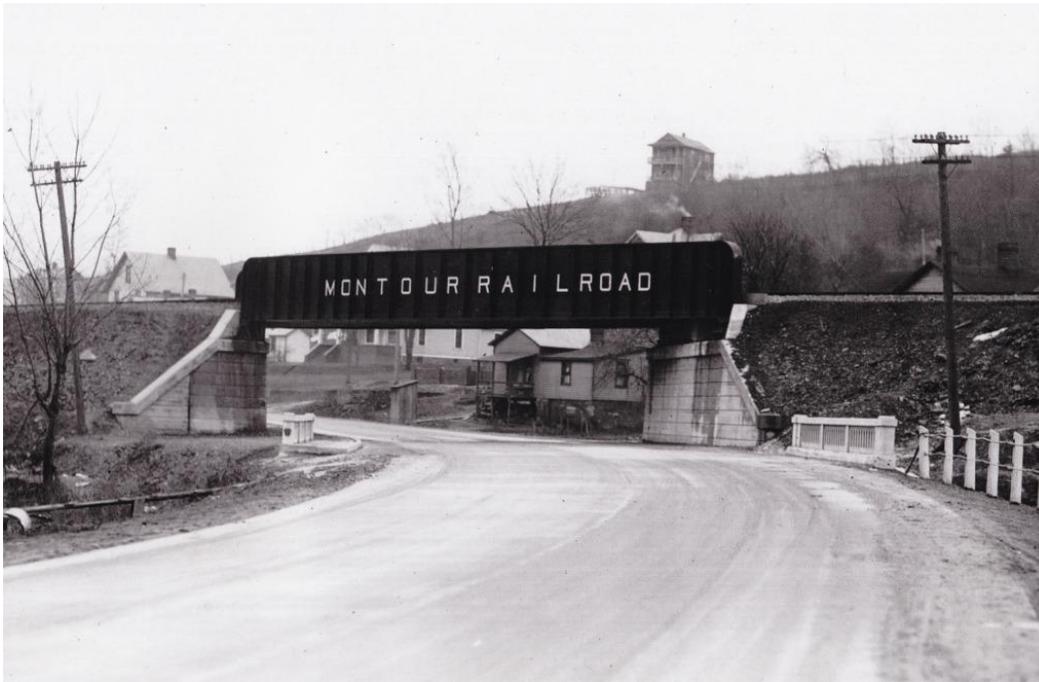


**A track gang installs the east switch at North Star Junction near Imperial ca. 1913.
Photo courtesy Andy Hanna / Kevin Kovach collection**

In 1913 the Montour Shops in Coraopolis were sold by the Pittsburgh Coal Company to the Montour Railroad and the old facilities in Imperial were abandoned. A new wye track was built at North Star, just south of Imperial to enable the steam locomotives to be turned for better operation. North Star replaced the abandoned wye at the Imperial Terminal.

During the 1920's, several realignment projects were undertaken to improve the railroad right-of-way and eliminate several problem areas. A tunnel was bored through a hillside north of Imperial, eliminating about a half-mile of track with several sharp curves. The railroad called this tunnel Jeffreytown for the community at its eastern end but it is known as Enlow by the Trail Council for the community at the west end nearest Imperial.

Another 1928 project saw the main line raised and moved to bypass the abandoned Imperial Terminal. It added a bridge over Route 30, eliminating a dangerous grade crossing which had a high accident rate.



**A 1930 view of the bridge eliminating a dangerous grade crossing of Rt. 30.
Photo courtesy Gene P. Schaeffer**

Several coal mines serviced by the Montour Railroad were located in or near Imperial. The Marshall Mine was northeast of town, with a railroad spur crossing McClaren Road to reach the mine. The Clinton Block Mine was on a spur running on the north side of Route 30, reaching the mine near the current Findlay Township Sports Complex. The Margerum Mine in Imperial was mentioned earlier. Jean Mine was located south of Imperial above North Star Road. Partridge Mine was further south of town at the end of the original railroad line at North Star. Several mines were also located in the Boggs area, including the Sunnyhill, Maraca, Rider, Solar, Boggs and Russell #2 mines.

Some of these mines were originally underground mines when they opened in the first half of the 1900's and in later years were reopened as strip mines to recover coal left in place during underground mining. As these mines played out, the Montour's focus shifted from Imperial to the newer mines further east along the main line.

**This column appeared in the July-August, 2022 Montour Trail Newsletter.
For more information on the Montour Trail – go to www.montourtrail.org**