

The Shops at Montour Junction

By Bob Ciminel - Montour Railroad Historical Society

Although the title may sound like an upscale shopping center, the shops at Montour Junction were anything but boutiques. However, there is no doubt that they were specialty shops.

In 2012, it was announced that the land at Montour Junction would be used to construct a state-of-the-art sports complex, and it seems appropriate to begin the first article of 2013 with a short history of Montour Junction and what was there.

The financial backers of the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie Railroad recognized the potential wealth in the coal deposits located on the eastern slopes of Montour Run and the profits that could be made by bringing that coal down to the P&LE and shipping it to the Great Lakes. Little additional prodding was needed to find other investors and organizing the Imperial Coal Company and the Montour Railroad in 1877.

The original four-mile route to Guys Mills was quickly extended another 8 miles to Valley Church and building the railroad community of Montour City (today's Imperial). By 1879, two mines, the Cliff Mine and the Montour Mine, were in operation and trainloads of coal were rolling into Montour Junction to be interchanged with the P&LE.

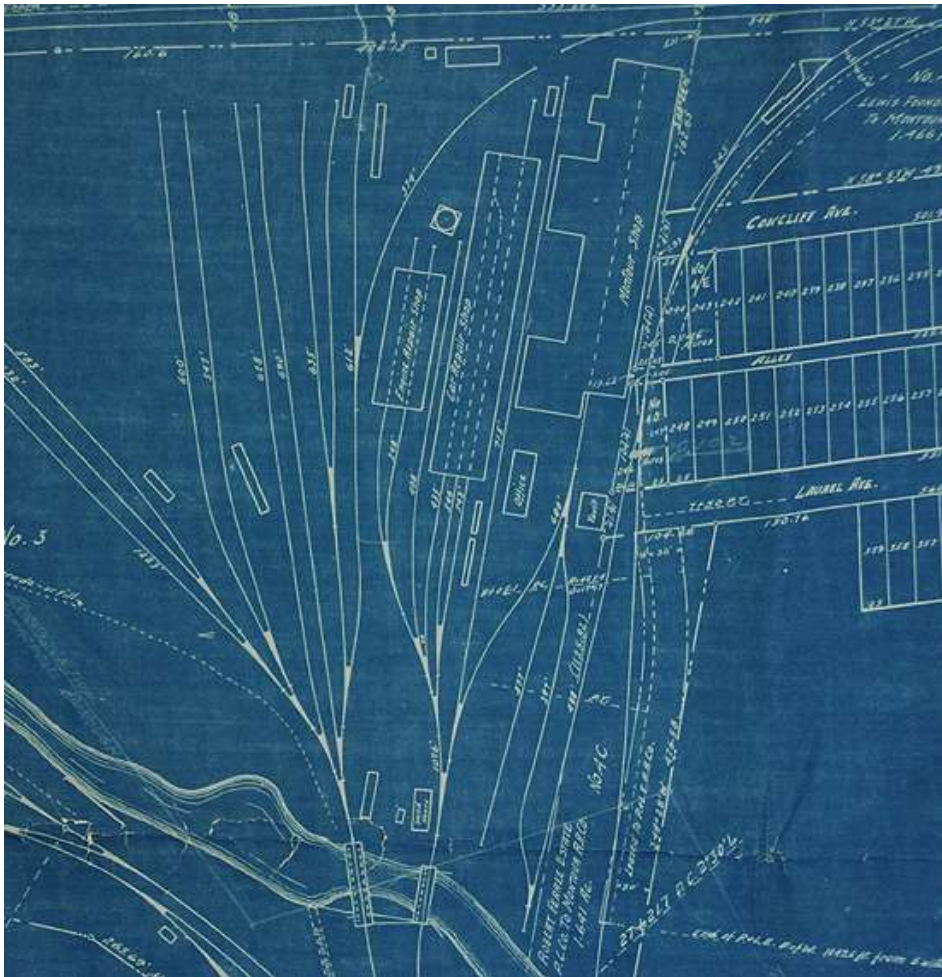
A wye and an engine house were constructed at Imperial for turning and servicing the locomotives, and a second engine house and turntable were built at Montour Junction for the same purpose.

With the Pittsburgh Coal Company's takeover of the Imperial Coal Company and the Montour Railroad in 1899, Montour Junction provided an ideal spot to construct shops for building and repairing both railroad cars and mine cars, including the electric locomotives used inside the mines.

By 1901, the Coal Company had constructed two long buildings for building/repairing cars and maintaining the electric locomotives. Apply named the Car Shop and the Motor Shop, the brick buildings were still there when the Montour Railroad was abandoned in the early 1980s. The shops were "sold" to the Montour Railroad in 1914 when the Mifflin Extension was completed.

To say the shops were prodigious places would be an understatement: In one year alone the men at the shops built 238 forty-ton coal cars and 2,110 mine cars.

This excerpt (below) from a 1915 blueprint shows the shops as they existed shortly after their ownership was transferred from the Coal Company to the Montour Railroad. The engine house, or Engine Repair Shop as shown on the blueprint, was the shorter building on the left, followed by the Car Repair Shop and the Motor Shop.



(Blueprint courtesy of Gene P. Schaeffer ©2012)

This aerial photo (below) shows the shops as they existed in 1946 when the Pittsburgh Coal Company merged with the Consolidation Coal Company and sold the Montour Railroad to the P&LE and Pennsylvania Railroad. The building in front of the former Motor Shop contained the offices and other support facilities for the railroad.



(Photo courtesy of the Historic Pittsburgh web site)

Lastly, we have a photograph of some of the maintenance personnel who worked at Montour Junction in the 1970s. They provide a perfect illustration of the dirty environment associated with running a coal railroad, even in the modern days of diesel locomotives and “clean” coal.



(Photo courtesy of the montourrr.com web site)

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