

# Library Viaduct

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

The Library Viaduct was one of the signature sights on the Montour Railroad. At 506 feet, it was the second longest bridge on the railroad. Only the McDonald Viaduct was longer.

A viaduct is defined as a bridge composed of several small spans for crossing a valley or gorge. Viaducts may span land or water or both. The Library Viaduct consists of eleven spans, supported by ten bents, or vertical steel columns. It crosses over the Piney Fork Creek valley, including Rt. 88 at the western end of the bridge and the PAT trolley tracks on the east side of the valley. It was built in 1919 by the American Bridge Company.

The spans are 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 bridge 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.



**This 1973 view shows three Montour locomotives shoving a coal train over the viaduct. 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 to inform the public as to who erected the bridge, a bit of century old advertising over the busy road and trolley line.

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. This track ran to the planned site of the Pittsburgh Coal Company's Montour Mine #10 along Brownsville Road in Library.

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 #10 complex. The old 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.

The Montour Trail now uses this old Library Branch line as its main trail, connecting with the Great Allegheny Passage trails at Clairton. Thus, a bit of difference of opinion often exists between Trail volunteers and the Montour Railroad historical buffs as to which parts of the Rail-to-Trail corridor are the "main line".



**Looking out the door of a caboose as it is shoved across the Library Viaduct. The safety walkway can be seen on the right side of the bridge. Planking and the side railing with chain link fence to protect traffic under the bridge from falling chunks of coal can be seen at the bottom of the picture. Gene P. Schaeffer photo.**

A retired Montour passenger coach was brought to the east end of the viaduct in the early years, repainted yellow and used as an office by the Montour Railroad Agent at Library. At a later time, a small brick station freight house was built along Pleasant

Street to handle local freight shipments. This station is still in place, housing the South Park Historical Society.

In the last eight years of railroad operations, the steep and winding railroad branch roadbed had deteriorated and most train movements were operated caboose first with the locomotives shoving on the rear of the train. So in the 1970's, the first sight of a train crossing the viaduct would not be the locomotives, but the caboose being pushed at the head of a string of coal hoppers.



**June 30, 1978. This small train consisting of engine #80 with caboose #36 and a single coal hopper was the last Montour Railroad movement over the Library Viaduct.**

**Gene P. Schaeffer photo.**

In 1978, the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie Railroad, which then owned the Montour Railroad, put an end to operations over the Library Branch. The final Montour train to work Montour Mine #10 retrieved a single hopper full of coal on June 30, 1978. This car had been set out of an earlier train because of a broken air line and after repairs had been completed, it was then picked up for shipment.

The Montour Railroad abandoned the Library Branch and thus the Library Viaduct when Montour #10 was permanently closed in late 1978.

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