

Montour Caboose

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

At the rear end of every Montour Railroad main line train was a caboose. Most trains today do not carry cabooses, with railroads opting to eliminate the extra weight and thus fuel needed to haul them. Cabooses were phased out of operation in the mid-to-late 1980's. They are still in use at places where a train must be shoved along a section of track in front of a locomotive, serving as a safety platform, with the train's conductor acting as a set of eyes on the leading end of the train.

Cabooses in the Montour era were used as an office and transportation for the conductor and brakemen. The conductor had a desk where he would complete his paperwork and car bills. In current days this information is handled by computers and with smaller crews operating trains, there is no need for the conductor to have a separate car. Benches and a toilet were provided for the crew's comfort. A coal fired stove was provided for heat and sometimes used for cooking. Many a meal was made using the old stoves in the Montour cabooses, with the train crew proving to be good and resourceful chefs.

Early Montour cabooses were made by converting wooden box cars, adding doors and perhaps a few windows or a cupola where a brakeman could keep an eye on the train cars in front of him, watching for problems or defects.



Caboose 29 was one of three wooden 4-wheel bobber type purchased from the New York Ontario & Western RR in 1921. It was retired in 1936. Photo courtesy Gene P. Schaeffer.

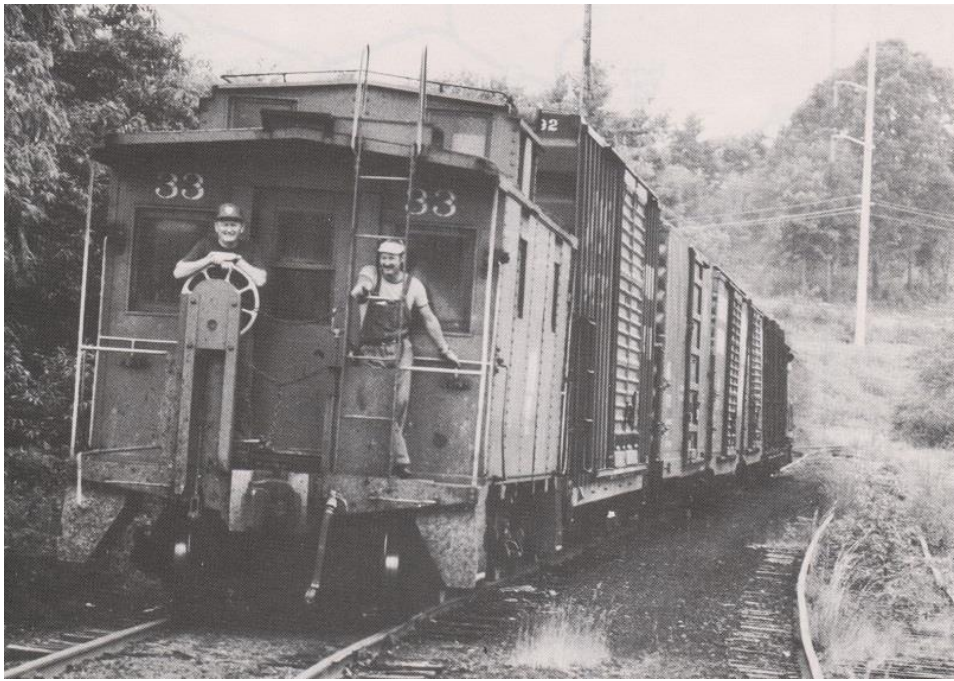
Later cabooses were made as specialized rolling stock, such as several 4-wheel bobber type purchased in 1921 and retired in 1936. These were small and cramped, and tended to have a pretty rough ride. The wooden Montour cabooses mostly were painted in the traditional red color.



Montour #48 was one of ten wooden cabooses built for the Montour by the Standard Steel Car Company in Butler in 1929. It was retired from service in 1971. Photo courtesy Michael Thompson Collection.

Larger wooden cabooses made their way onto the Montour as coal traffic increased in the 1930's. They had steel underframes to withstand the forces of helper locomotives pushing on the rear of a loaded coal train. Several used wooden cabooses were also bought from other railroads and served for almost 40 years.

In 1969, the Montour's parent company, the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie RR, purchased 11 steel cabooses built in 1944 that the Union Pacific RR was retiring. They arrived at the P&LE McKees Rocks shops wearing their full UP yellow colors. The cabooses were quickly repainted with the P&LE green scheme and reassigned to several subsidiary railroads, including the Montour. Of the 11 cabooses, seven went to the Montour to replace outdated wooden ones. Two went to the Youngstown & Southern (Y&S), one to the Pittsburgh, Chartiers & Youghiogheny (PC&Y) and one stayed on the P&LE. The Montour cabooses entered service in March, 1970 and served on the railroad until they were retired between 1981 and 1983.



The conductor and brakeman keep watch as caboose 33 leads a train shoving through Library Junction. Gene P. Schaeffer photo

The Montour used cabooses until the end of operations. At times, the caboose would be leading a train as it would be shoved along one of the sections of the railroad. One common occurrence was for a train working Brookside Lumber in Bethel Park to be shoved several miles to Library Junction, where the train could be turned on the wye so that the locomotive would then be leading and pulling the train westbound. Another was on the Library Branch where trains were shoved to or from Montour Mine #10 or to the interchange at Snowden, where there was no place to turn a train. The conductor and brakemen would act as the leading eyes of the train, watching for obstructions and other problems.

Several ex-Montour cabooses still survive as displays or in non-operational railroad themed use. The recently added caboose beside the trail at the Montour Mine #4 site at Milepost 30 was one of the 11 UP cabooses purchased by the P&LE. This particular caboose went to the Youngstown & Southern, but is one of the same batch that worked on the Montour until operations ended.

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