



# The Liggie

Published by the Ligonier Valley Rail Road Association for Friends of the LVRR  
December 2017

## Another Connection to the Railroad

Covington Investment Advisors is located at 301 East Market Street in Ligonier. The firm occupies an unassuming but very aesthetically pleasing and well maintained building that was erected in 1883 for one Matthew B. Smith, a livestock dealer, and his wife, Margaret B. Smith.



As a young man Matthew Smith worked for his parents as a drover, bringing the family farm livestock to market. Smith became a farmer in his own right as well as a livestock dealer. It is certain that the opening of the Ligonier Valley Rail Road in 1877 enhanced his livelihood significantly by providing a more efficient way to ship livestock to market.

A November 15, 1877, note in the register of the Ligonier House Hotel, stated that "M.B. Smith shipped to New York 168 head of hogs and 77 head of sheep" on the new Ligonier Valley Rail Road.

Westmoreland County records reveal that Matthew and Margaret Smith purchased the lot at 301 East Main Street for \$660.00 in November of 1882. Because Smith was doing well financially, it is assumed he had the house built soon after purchasing the lot.



A 1900 "bird's eye view" shows a barn at the rear of the property. Given the size of the structure, one can assume that Matthew Smith had it constructed to shelter livestock before being shipped to market on the Ligonier Valley Rail Road.

In 1897 Matthew Smith died, having lived at 301 East Main Street for fourteen years. Records of the 1900 census reveal that Smith's widow, Margaret, lived at 301 East Main Street, where she died on March 8, 1915.



Thanks to Patrick Wallace, Covington Investment Advisors, Inc., for providing the information about 301 East Main Street.

***“HOW THE RAILROAD CHANGED  
LIGONIER”***

The highlight of the Ligonier Valley Rail Road Association’s Eleventh Annual Dinner, back on September 16, 2017, was the address, ***“HOW THE RAILROAD CHANGED LIGONIER,”*** delivered by Ralph Kinney Bennett, an avid historical scholar of the Ligonier Valley. Following are excerpts of his presentation:

“Initially, Ligonier’s whole reason for being was the fort, built in 1758 as part of the grand – and ultimately successful – British scheme to drive the French out of the stronghold, Fort Duquesne, at the confluence of the Allegheny, Monongahela, and Ohio Rivers, and ultimately out of the Ohio Valley.

As I like to say, Ligonier made Pittsburgh possible. But once history had passed Fort Ligonier by and it fell into ruin, such was the pull of our beautiful valley that a scattering of settlers, a vestigial town, remained there along the Loyalhanna. Because of the lure of the west, the powerful pull of the lands beyond the Allegheny Mountains, the road built by General Forbes across Pennsylvania to move an army now became one of the principal roads for the pioneers – that much larger army of farmers, woodsmen, artisans, entrepreneurs, dreamers, main-chancers, and ne’r-do-wells, all seeking land and freedom and opportunity on the ever moving frontier.

The little community that sometimes called itself ‘Ligonier Old Fort’ sat astride one of the main routes to the growing city of Pittsburgh and the vast west beyond. ... I never drive over Allegheny Mountain or Laurel Hill on Route 30 that I do not wonder at the sheer stubborn persistence and cold courage of the men and women who came over these densely forested, boulder-strewn slopes on foot,

beside heavily-laden pack horses or, later, with Conestoga wagons.

Forbes Road would eventually become the Philadelphia-Pittsburgh Turnpike, Pennsylvania’s first border-to-border road. Gradually its hazards would be eliminated or minimized; its crushed stone bed would be compacted and improved, and its formidable grades and curves moderated to whatever degree possible to accommodate a vast and growing traffic.

By 1800, Pittsburgh had about 1,500 inhabitants; by 1810 there were close to 5,000, and by 1820 there were over 7,000. Other cities to the west were growing as well, and as the great Midwestern rivers swelled with barge and steamboat commerce, there began to be a considerable expansion of traffic eastward through Ligonier as well as west.

Little Ligonier was a place of rest and repair for legions of travelers. Even wagons as sturdy as the legendary Conestogas were beaten and broken by travel over the Alleghenies. Wheels, axles, running gear, and harnesses required replacement and repair. Horses died or were worn out. So Ligonier became a place of taverns (as hotels were then called), livery stables, blacksmiths, wagon builders, carriage makers, wheelwrights, farriers, cobblers, and harness makers.”

What is now the Ligonier Diamond, “... was a rough, crowded, busy rectangle of stone-flecked dirt, cut into quadrants by the Turnpike and the north-south State Road crossing in its midst, right where the bandstand is now located. Each of these quadrants was usually jammed with coaches, wagons, horses, temporarily penned cattle or sheep or teams of pack horses. The Diamond’s dirt was of a peculiar quality, ground so finely by the constant pounding of animal hooves and wagon wheels that it produced a yellowish

haze during dry spells and a dispiriting, clinging, boot-sucking, gravy-like mud in the rain and snow of winter and spring. It was not uncommon to lose a boot while walking across the Diamond.

Busy servicing its relentless through traffic, the town had become, as at least one 19<sup>th</sup> century historian has observed, a sort of 19<sup>th</sup> century Breezewood – a place where you stopped for a day but didn't stay; a place tied to the fortunes of the Turnpike. And in the early 1800s those fortunes had been very good. Ponder with me for a moment the challenge of moving goods and people across Pennsylvania in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Until the advent of the steam engine and railroads, all of man's history and commerce for thousands of years had moved at the pace of a horse. The only real exception being sailing vessels on water. The fact that we still measure engines by horsepower is a vestigial reminder of that truth. *The pace of a horse*. And often the pace of a horse was tempered, or rather, burdened, by steep hills, bad roads, bad weather, and heavy loads.

Consider a man wanting to travel from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh in, say 1840. If he was a businessman and needed to get to Pittsburgh fast, he might avail himself of the services of one of the most prominent stage coach lines, the Pittsburgh and Philadelphia Transportation Company. It promised to get him to Pittsburgh in 56 hours for the handsome sum of \$20.00. Twenty dollars. When the average yearly income of a textile worker might be a little over \$100.00.

Our traveler faced two and a third days of straight travel on the Turnpike – not stopping overnight – sleeping in his seat when and if he could. The coaches left Pittsburgh and Philadelphia each day, morning and evening. They would change horse teams every 10 to 15 miles. At

certain of these relay stations, passengers might have 20 minutes to grab some sort of lunch in a tavern. But most stops – like the Ligonier House, on the Diamond, were known as 'exchange taverns,' where the grooms would be waiting to quickly unhitch tired horses, replace them with a fresh team, hand the lines over to the driver and send the coach off in a few minutes, straining to keep up the pace.

The idea was to average 6 to 8 miles an hour. That our 1840 traveler made it to Pittsburgh in one piece was one thing; that he made it on time would be a small miracle.

But the world beyond the Valley was changing rapidly, and something happened that caused the traffic that had kept Ligonier alive and lively to diminish dramatically.

This, of course, was the railroad, specifically the completion of the Main Line of the mighty Pennsylvania Railroad in 1852.

There is no time here to pay full tribute to the handful of merchants, business and civic leaders from an isolated and languishing Ligonier, who, in fits and starts, and with more enthusiasm than capital, were finally wise enough to importune Judge Thomas Mellon to rescue the LVRR venture in 1877. The fact that we are here tonight is because, as we know, Judge Mellon and his sons changed everything again for Ligonier by building ten and half miles of rail that we celebrate and seek to perpetuate in our civic memory. Ligonier Valley Rail Road was not merely successful, it was successful in such a profound way and at so many levels that most people have either forgotten or taken for granted what it achieved. But the very form and character of Ligonier today is a direct result of this success.

By 1880, even before the Mellons had switched from narrow gauge (3 feet) to standard gauge (4 feet, 8 ½ inches) on their line, the population of Ligonier had more than doubled to 750.

Ligonier, now open to the national marketplace as never before, was benefitting from two of the most important, though largely unheralded products of American ingenuity in the industrial age: First, machine-made nails, rather than the crude ones cut one-by-one in tedious training by blacksmith's apprentices. And, second, the mill-formed white pine two by four. The two by four revolutionized house building, all thanks to the steam-powered planing machine, invented in 1828 by a man named William Wordsworth (not the poet). ... And the lumber, the boards, and kegs of nails moved by rail.

The railroad, of course, was a revolution for Ligonier's merchants. It was not just a matter of goods in greater abundance brought swiftly and safely by rail, but the type of goods as well. Items that the average Ligonier resident could only have dreamed of in the 'old days' of the Turnpike were now within reach. It would soon become common to have a piano in the parlor of a house out in Rector or up on Summit Street. A piano? Brought whole or partially dismantled over Laurel Mountain in a wagon? Unlikely, rare, exorbitantly expensive except for the wealthy. But now they would be regularly advertised in the town's new newspaper, *The Ligonier Echo*. Sets of china, especially Queensware and its various imitations, were popular, but how much of it could a storekeeper have hoped to have delivered unbroken if it came over the mountains by wagon? Now it came in carefully crated lots on the morning train.

The automobile brought back the old Pike. Route 30, the Lincoln Highway, still passed directly through Ligonier, and

from the 1920s on through the 40s, it was common for the *Echo* to report how many thousand cars had passed through the Diamond on holidays and summer weekends. The LVRR trains still brought thousands to Idlewild and hundreds to Ligonier. But a steam engine and a rail car could never match the inevitability of the automobile, nor the automobile's articulate quality of door to door transport.

I remember, it must have been about 1950, sitting in my Uncle George's Chrysler as we came to a stop on West Main Street, in front of Butch Stouffer's garage. A LVRR engine emerged from behind Stouffer's and, with bell ringing, it lumbered across the street right in front of us, on the way to the engine house. It huffed just a little and seemed to groan, and I fancied that I could feel the vibrations from the pavement coming up through our car. It was a dark and majestic thing to see, so close to us and towering above us. I was impressed. I was too young to even think, let alone fully grasp, that the 1948 Chrysler Windsor sedan in which I sat had superseded that mighty engine and that those gleaming tracks set so smoothly into the asphalt would soon disappear.

That engine, and the wonderful little railroad it served, had put Ligonier on the map in a special and indelible way... and helped make it the lovely and lively town it is today."

Many thanks to Ralph Kinney Bennett for permitting the verbatim use of these excerpts. A copy of Bennett's entire speech is on file in the archives of the Ligonier Valley Rail Road Association. Research projects such as this will be shared with future generations at the museum in the restored Darlington Station.

## ALL ABOARD!

The model-train-layout committee is heading in a new direction for 2018. Having exhausted the supply of fresh layouts in this area, the plan is to take a one-year sabbatical and come back with several new layouts in 2019. There are two known layouts in progress, but will not be ready until 2019.

Meanwhile, the committee has opted to stay together and explore several day trips for 2018. Some of the considerations are: Strasburg Railroad, Altoona Railroaders Museum, Horseshoe Curve, Everett Railroad, and the Pennsylvania Trolley Museum. Readers can count on a trip to visit the train layouts at the Carnegie Science Center and Western Pennsylvania Model Railroad Museum in Gibsonia. Do you have any suggestions? Please call the museum phone and leave a message. Details will be published in the next edition of "The Liggie."

## Fort Days

There were many visitors, many good questions, and good public relations for the Ligonier Valley Rail Road Association and Museum. Thanks to the volunteers and all the visitors. Ringing the bell from Engine #19 was a special treat for the kids.



### **The Mission of the Ligonier Valley Rail Road Association** Organized in 2004

**To preserve the legacy of the LVRR  
To conserve vestiges of the LVRR  
To collect memorabilia of the LVRR  
To educate the public about railroading in  
Ligonier Valley**

## REQUEST FOR STORIES

Bob McKie, editor of "The Liggie," is always seeking stories about the Ligonier Valley Rail Road, as well as the Pittsburg, Westmoreland, and Somerset Railroad.

Perhaps you have some personal memories. Maybe you rode the last LVRR train on August 31, 1952. Did a relative or friend work for the LVRR?

Please forward your stories to Robert McKie, 3036 Ben Venue Drive, Greensburg, PA 15601-3822 or e-mail Bob at [cnemckie@gmail.com](mailto:cnemckie@gmail.com)

Many thanks!

***LVRRRA Museum  
at the restored Darlington Station  
3032 Idlewild Hill Rd  
PO Box 21  
Ligonier, PA 15658***

***Museum Hours of Operation  
Saturdays, year round, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.***

***Contact Information  
724-238-7819    [lvrra@verizon.net](mailto:lvrra@verizon.net)***

### **The Ligonier Valley Rail Road Association Board of Directors**

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## Memorial Brick Walkway

The Ligonier Valley Rail Road Association has installed the memorial brick walkway leading to the caboose. It was made possible through a grant awarded by the Ligonier Valley Endowment and several anonymous donations. The first 30 engraved bricks were placed in October, and as of November 30, another 36 bricks have been purchased. All donors to date are listed in the adjacent column. Additional bricks may be purchased using the application printed on the back page of this newsletter.



*Loved ones can be recognized and honored in this memorial walkway leading to the caboose.*



*Mary Lou Mitchell holds the brick engraved in her honor by daughter, Pam Stablein*



*A paver recognizing the founders of the railroad is prominently located at the beginning of the walkway.*

## Donors of Bricks September through November 2017

Bob Boynton  
David Byers  
Kerry Byers  
Kelly Byers-Allen  
Ruth Campbell and Family  
Mary Ruthe Carnahan  
Valerie Concus  
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Ligonier Mounties Class of 1959  
Ligonier Valley Class of 1964  
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Barbara Stahl  
Bob and Carolyn Stutzman  
Rosalie Stutzman  
Regis and Diane Synan  
Nancy Truitt-Burkett  
Patrick R. Wallace  
Judi Wilson

*Photos from the 2017 annual dinner meeting for Friends of the Ligonier Valley Rail Road*



*DeNunzio's Latrobe was the site of the 2017 LVRR dinner.*



*Buffet line*



*Centerpieces were created by Bob and Sally Ambrose.*



*Guest Speaker – Ralph Kinney Bennett*



*Jack Kinsey and Linda McKenna Boxx*



*Ruth Campbell – A raffle basket winner*



# ***LIGONIER VALLEY RAIL ROAD ASSOCIATION***

## **Brick Memorial Walkway**

**Help to establish a capital fund to upkeep and maintain the restored Darlington Station by buying a brick(s) to honor or memorialize loved ones. The brick walkway originates at the parking lot and leads visitors to the vintage bobber caboose. A prominent marker in the path recognizes Judge Thomas Mellon and his sons as the founders of the Ligonier Valley Rail Road.**

\_\_\_\_\_ 4"x8"     \$50.00    3 lines of engraving up to 17 characters per line, spaces, numbers and letters  
*(Please photocopy this form to order additional bricks)*

Purchased by: Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone No: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Engraving: *PLEASE PRINT LEGIBLY/ ALL ENGRAVING SUBJECT TO COMMITTEE APPROVAL*

LINE 1																		
LINE 2																		
LINE 3																		

Bricks will be randomly placed in the walkway. Contributions may be tax deductible, contact your financial advisor.

Please return completed form along with check payable to:

LVRRA  
 C/O BOB STUTZMAN  
 605 WALNUT STREET  
 LATROBE, PA 15650

**QUESTIONS: ?????**

Contact:     Bob Stutzman  
                   lvrra@verizon.net  
                   724-537-2647