

# The Liggie

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

March 2010

Volume 6 - Issue 1

## GRAND OPENING OF THE RESTORED DARLINGTON STATION TO COINCIDE WITH LVRRA'S ANNUAL DINNER

At the fifth annual dinner meeting, the Friends of the Ligonier Valley Rail Road will celebrate the grand opening of the restored Darlington Station on Thursday May 20, 2010, from 5 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. *(Please note the change of date.)*

The evening will include a buffet dinner catered by Vallozzi's Restaurant and a program featuring guest speaker Charles A. Fagan, III, local historian. Throughout the evening, guests will have the opportunity to tour the recently completed museum.



*The LVRRA will celebrate the grand opening of the restored Darlington Station on May 20, 2010.*

The goal of the LVRRA BOD is to make the annual dinner a unique experience by recreating a nostalgic atmosphere. It will be reminiscent of the days when trainloads of visitors arrived at Darlington Station and Idlewild Park, anxious to enjoy a picnic in the beautiful Ligonier Valley, Pennsylvania's Mountain Playground.

In the same tradition that tourists disembarking the picnic trains in front of the Darlington Station were assisted by the conductor, guests will exit their cars by the platform and be greeted by "conductor" Dave Byers, the son and grandson of past LVRR employees. Arriving guests are encouraged to take time to appreciate the turn-of-the-century craftsmanship on the exterior of the building, which appears today almost as it did when passengers visited 100 years ago.

Guests may then choose to tour the station or go directly to the tent where the evening's festivities will take place. The highlight of the night for most attending, hopefully, will be perusing the artifacts, relics, photographs and memorabilia now on display in the station.

Helping to perpetuate the atmosphere of nostalgia, a picnic-fare menu will be served buffet style under the big tent in the parking lot at the station. Adding to the atmosphere of the evening, Terry Sabo will provide background music reflective of years gone by.

A cash bar will be available throughout the evening. Invitations with additional details will be mailed to all Friends by mid-April. Hopefully, all members will make an extra special effort to attend this year's event to help celebrate the culmination of the past three years of work.

*\* It is hard to believe that this will be LVRRA's fifth annual meeting, the first taking place at Ligonier Country Inn, the second at Colonial Inn, and the third and fourth at Pike Run Country Club. How fast time flies!*

## EXPLORE VESTIGES OF THE 100-YEAR-OLD PW&S ROADBED

One benefit of being a dues-paying Friend of the LVRRA is being able to participate in the annual field trips, which trace bygone right-of-ways (ROW) of local railroads. The 2010 field trip will trace the Pittsburgh, Westmoreland and Somerset (PW&S) roadbed from its interchange in Ligonier into the mountain south of Rector. John Vucina, a retired park ranger for Forbes State Forest, will lead the tour.



*Tour guide John Vucina stands on a PW&S bridge abutment behind St. Michael's Church in Rector.*

The tour will assemble at the former Ligonier Station on West Main Street on Saturday April 10 at 10 a.m. with plans to return by 3 p.m. Since there is no provision for a lunch stop, plan to pack a bag lunch. Please wear proper footwear as there will be the opportunity to do some walking on moderate grades.

The tour will follow the ROW from the Ligonier Station to the location where the Byers-Allen Lumber Company stood alongside its logging pond. One of the most intact bridge abutments can be seen where the PW&S first crossed the Loyalhanna Creek at the sawmill.

From there, the tour will proceed southeastward to where the bridge abutments at Mellons Crossing and the abandoned ROW are plainly visible. The group will then trace the ROW through Rector and other now-defunct stations to the top of Laurel Mountain. In Somerset County the tour will conclude after

pursuing remnants of the ROW in the "towns" of Zufall, Gillette and Allenvale.



*Abutments of another PW&S crossing are visible in Forbes State Forest.*

Hopefully, many Friends will take this opportunity to explore the fascinating history of the PW&S and its ascent up the mountain. This experience will allow those on the tour to appreciate why every trip up and down the mountain was followed with a celebratory "Whew!"

**PLEASE NOTE:** For everyone's enjoyment and convenience, the LVRRA has chartered a bus to transport those on the tour in one vehicle. This will allow everyone to be able to hear the tour guide, John Vucina, as he shares his knowledge of the PW&S. To offset the cost of the bus, a check for \$20, payable to the LVRRA, PO Box 21, Ligonier, PA 15650, must be received by April 3.

### CALENDAR OF LVRRA EVENTS

April 10, 2010 — PW&S Field Trip  
May 1, 2010 — Layout Tour  
May 20, 2010 — Private Grand Opening  
and Annual Dinner  
May 21, 2010 — Public Grand Opening  
September 25, 2010 — Annual Gala

## GRAND OPENING FOR THE PUBLIC SCHEDULED FOR MAY 21

The general public will be invited to visit the railroad museum at the Darlington Station beginning Friday May 21, 2010. At that time, the museum will be open from 9 a.m. to noon, four days a week, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday. The admission fee is \$5 per adult and \$3 per student. Children 5 and under will be admitted free. The welcoming staff, headed by Frank Dominick, lead docent, will provide guided tours throughout the station and the caboose. The LVRRA gift shop will be open for guests to buy items, such as LVRRA denim shirts and hats, model trains printed with Ligonier Valley markings, DVDs of Wilpen during the 1940s, etc.

**Memorial Contribution  
In Memory of  
Russel W. Lowden  
By  
Norine Allen**

## RECENT CONTRIBUTIONS

*Thanks to all contributors for the following items that have been donated to the LVRRA since the last Liggie publication:*

### **Bill Burns**

General interest railroad books for the library

### **Ed Concus**

1970 aerial view of Wilpen

### **Robin and Jim Whipkey**

Train related DVD sets for the library

### **Roberta Reep and Janet Bell**

1903 panoramic photograph of Wilpen

### **Roy Culbert**

Two series of Jim Beam decanters with unbroken seals, one series depicting a freight train and the other a passenger train, to be sold by auction or raffle to benefit the LVRRA

## OVERVIEW OF THE BYERS-ALLEN LUMBER COMPANY AND THE PITTSBURGH, WESTMORELAND AND SOMERSET RAILROAD

As civilization moved westward in the 1800s, much of the Pennsylvania virgin woodlands had already been timbered. By the turn of the 20th century, however, the lumber industry in western Pennsylvania was still prospering. Demand for its products, from framing, siding and lath for the construction business, to mining posts and railroad ties, was ever growing.

At this time a vast stand of timber still remained on Laurel Mountain between Ligonier and Somerset. Realizing this, a group of men, led by Captain Nelson Byers of Williamsport, hoped to capitalize on this natural resource by entering into an agreement with Somerset attorney W. H. Ruppel to purchase 9500 acres of woodland on Laurel Mountain south of Rector for \$50,000 with the intent of building a sawmill nearby.

As a result, Byers and his associates petitioned for a charter to be granted for the Byers-Allen Lumber Company, a charter which it received in April 1899. This decision to start a new lumber company quickly brought about much positive change in the area.

Even before the investors of the Byers-Allen Lumber Company determined the location for their sawmill, they knew they would need a railroad to connect the sawmill with the property to be logged above Rector. Consequently, they petitioned for a charter for a railroad, separate from that of the lumber company, resulting in the formation of the Pittsburgh Westmoreland and Somerset Railroad (PW&S).

Before work could begin on cutting the timber or building the roadbed and sawmill, the investors realized the necessity of importing laborers. The search for loggers led to contractors Thomas and

(continued on next page)

Whiting, who provided some 50 workers to fell the trees and cut the logs. Another contractor from Lock Haven, Charles Greico, brought a crew of 70 Italian immigrants to build the roadbed. Additionally, 100 local men were hired to work at the sawmill and on the railroad. The result of all this new development was an economic burst to the surrounding communities.

### **Logging Begins on the Mountain**

Work began almost simultaneously on cutting trees, surveying and grading the roadbed for the train, and building the sawmill. Byers-Allen brought in lumber men to log the trees and skid them to a location where they could later be loaded onto railroad cars. The "wood hicks," as they were called, were by far the "most colorful characters" in the region and were known for both their hard drinking and hard working.

These men, who worked in gangs of 10 to 50, lived lonely lives in rough quarters in camps often hidden deep in the forest on the mountain. Some of these camps even had their own company stores, blacksmith shops, and dining rooms. R.R. McKinley wrote in the October 18, 1899, issue of the *Ligonier Echo* about the exciting operation at the Thomas and Whiting lumber camp, noting the interesting sight of 50 woodsmen sitting at the dinner table wearing their long-nailed shoes.

The mule skidders could drag a log 40 feet long to within 300 feet of the railroad. Sometimes they could skid as many as 20 logs in a day to a staging area. When a logging train reached a staging area, a crane, called a log loader, was used to winch the logs onto the flatbed cars. Once loaded, the train would then return to the sawmill.

### **Railroad Moves Toward the Summit**

The gang of men who graded the ROW and laid track southward toward Somerset actually began their work before the

railroad was chartered. Once a charter was granted, the PW&S's work became easier as it was then able to condemn properties in order to gain the right-of-ways necessary to reach the timber.

As the workers moved up the mountain-side, they graded the roadbed and laid track reaching the top of the mountain, 10 miles south of Ligonier by June 30, 1900. By November the railroad had been extended another five miles south across the crest of Laurel Mountain in the direction of Somerset. At the same time along the main line, workers were building spur lines, sometimes at a 12 percent grade, to staging areas where logs would later be loaded onto cars. These spurs were temporary and built with small logs serving as ties, and little, if any, ballast leveling the tracks. Months before the roadbed reached the summit, trains were already transporting logs from the staging areas to the sawmill.



*Engine #76 is shown pulling a load of logs on the Marker flat between Rector and Ligonier.*

The return trip down the mountain of a train loaded with logs was always a harrowing experience. Since the PW&S chose not to use switchbacks in constructing its roadbed, a 10 percent grade existed in places. There were frequent reports of red-hot brake shoes on railcars descending the mountain. As a result of the danger, brake shoes were replaced every other day. Even so, reports of run-away trains and engines straddling the railroad tracks were commonplace.

### **Sawmill Takes on Huge Proportions**

When the Byers-Allen Lumber Company identified the ideal location for its sawmill on a small farm on the northern bank of the Loyalhanna Creek southeast of Ligonier (near where the ABC Motel is located

today), it met some resistance from the owner. After Ligonier businessmen convinced the owner, Dave R. Marker, of the advantages of having the sawmill in the area, Marker agreed on May 1, 1899, to lease eight acres of his land for 10 years to the lumber company for \$300 per year, including the right-of-way for the railroad through his property.

Workers completed the foundation for the mill by June 1899. Once completed, the building measured 48 by 134 feet, making it the largest building in Ligonier. Franklin Langsdale reports that the mill "was a double-band mill and the logs were elevated into position so that gravity would feed them into the roaring saws."

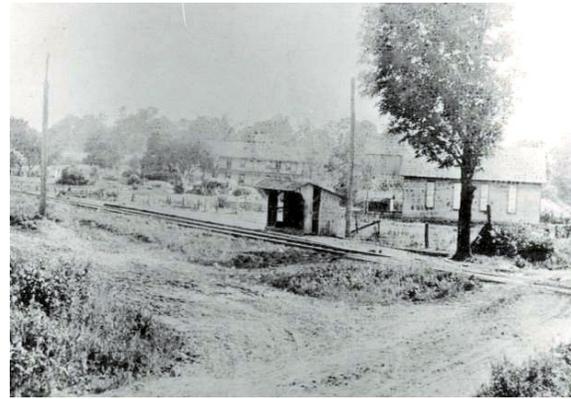
By the time the mill started to produce lumber in January 1900, thanks to the hard-working lumbermen, large stockpiles of logs were already waiting at staging areas in the mountain to be transported by the PW&S to the sawmill. Once the carloads of logs arrived at the mill, the logs were dumped into a nearby pond, nearly an acre in size, where they were floated toward the mill for processing.

### **Freight and Passenger Service Added**

Freight service began in 1900 when the PW&S purchased two boxcars to carry shipments of food to the mountain camps and transport produce back from farms into town. By 1906 freight service had been extended to Somerset. Interestingly, the freight mentioned in records included not only coal, timber and produce, but also barrels of beer and manure.

In 1901 the PW&S offered passenger service to stations on the western slope of Laurel Mountain, having bought a passenger coach to add to the end of one of its logging trains. The first passenger schedule was dated June 10, 1901, and included stops at Ligonier Depot, Market Street, Byers Mill, Mechanicsburg, Rectors Mill and Bluestone. The 1906 schedule added Mellons Crossing, Speedwell, Grove Run, Laurel Summit,

Zufall, Gillette, Allenvale, Husband and Somerset. Surprisingly, passenger revenues usually exceeded freight revenues.



*1910 photograph of the Byers Station  
(Note the Rector United Methodist Church in the background.)*

### **PW&S Begins To Falter**

When the timber ran out in 1906, the revenue of the PW&S decreased dramatically. During that same year Captain Byers, who was the pivotal person responsible for the success of the railroad, died. Without his leadership, the decline of the railroad hastened.

That the railroad remained in service until 1916, 10 years after the lumber was depleted, is somewhat remarkable. Some of the appeal for tourists' riding the rails began to disappear with the increasing popularity of the automobile. Also, projected revenues for the transport of freight never materialized. Records show that between 1908 and 1916 passenger revenues decreased 40 percent and freight revenues 50 percent. Meanwhile, the maintenance of the railroad was neglected since funds were being used in other places.

All of these factors contributed to the demise of the PW&S. Over the 16 years that it was in service, however, the PW&S influenced the development of Ligonier Valley in a way not seen since the beginning of the LVRR in 1877.

*All of the information in this article was taken from two sources: Stemwinders in the Laurel Highlands, written by Benjamin F. G. Kline, Jr., and The Story of a Mountain Railroad, written by Franklin J. Langsdale.*

## FALL FOLIAGE FIELD TRIP TO STRAUSBURG

If interested in joining a group of Friends to carpool to Strausburg and ride a steam-driven train and visit the Pennsylvania Railroad Museum, call the office at 724-238-7819 or send an e-mail to lvrra@verizon.net

### MEA CULPA

Thanks to Tom Evans for catching the error in the caption for the photograph in the December *Liggie*. The dispatcher's name in the photo should have been listed as Milton Geeting, not George. Thank you Tom!



*Conductor Denny Piper, on left, shown receiving Last Run orders from dispatcher Milton Geeting while engineers Ed Blair and Fred Iscrupe look on*

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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## 2010 LAYOUT TOUR SCHEDULED FOR MAY 1

LVRRA's second layout tour has been scheduled for Saturday May 1, 2010. Five layouts, all in the greater-Greensburg area, promise an exciting glimpse into the fantasy world of model railroading.

One layout, in O gauge high-rail, features a four-track mainline, running trains with consists of up to 50 cars each. A second layout, in HO scale, replicates the realism of a prototypical railroad yard where a dispatcher directs train movement with written train orders. The next realistically displays life in O gauge scale along the Monongahela River during the Penn-Central era. One classic post-war O gauge layout features numerous animated accessories. Another includes a five-train layout along with an extensive Lionel collection.



*Committee members (left to right) Dave Somerville, Bret Pohland and Jim Murdock are shown enjoying one of the layouts which will be on the 2010 model-train tour.*

Tickets are limited to 200. Already, 40 people have signed up. At \$10 per adult and \$5 per child under the age of 16, the 2010 tour will benefit the operating fund of the Ligonier Valley Rail Road Association. To obtain a ticket, send a check to LVRRA, PO Box 21, Ligonier, PA 15658, no later than April 23. Tickets for the self-guided tour, a map, and the addresses and phone numbers of the layout hosts will be mailed in time for the tour.

## SUSAN SHAFFER JOINS THE STAFF OF THE LVRRA

The Title V program administered by Westmoreland Community College has enabled Susan Shaffer to join the staff of the LVRRA. She is working with Secretary/Director Bill Potthoff and Frank Dominick cataloging artifacts. Shaffer also doubles as the office assistant for the LVRRA. Having worked at the Compass Inn for the past three years, Shafer brings with her invaluable experience. Welcome aboard!

## PETROVITTS PAINTING RESTORATION UPDATE

Patrick R. Wallace, president of Covington Investment Advisors, has volunteered to underwrite the cost of the restoration of the original painting by Milan Petrovitts recently donated to the LVRRA by the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

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Phones are answered  
from 9 a.m. to noon on Tuesday,  
Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday.

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 the history of  
railroading in Ligonier Valley

## UPDATE FROM THE OFFICE STAFF

Slowly and deliberately, work progresses at the museum as the staff identifies and catalogs items for display in the museum. The staff also is working on the information that will be used to narrate the story of the LVRR and its impact on the valley. Along with complimentary attractions such as Fort Ligonier, Compass Inn, Lincoln Highway Heritage Corridor and Idlewild Park, the Darlington Station has a tremendous opportunity to become part of the tourism industry in Ligonier Valley. Those who visit the restored Darlington Station and its museum will learn much about how the LVRR enhanced the economic development of the region.

As time nears for the grand opening of the station, several volunteers are needed. Friends interested should call the office at 724-238-7819 or stop by the station on a Saturday morning.

The following opportunities exist for those wishing to volunteer:

Docent/tour guide: Docents lead visitors through the museum and relate the story of the LVRR. They will be given an instructional manual, prepared by Frank Dominick, which will provide suggestions on how to function effectively as a docent and give a comprehensive overview of the LVRR. Docents have the greatest impact on how much a guest enjoys his or her visit.

Archivist: The most important position in any museum is the preservation and display of artifacts. Archivists will maintain the collection and authenticate its relevance to the overall mission of the museum.

Gift Shop Attendant: Volunteers will sell admission tickets and merchandise, as well as restock shelves and generally help out. Retail experience is a plus, but the LVRRA will train interested parties.

Of course, the grand opening, annual dinner and gala will require extra hands. Anyone interested, please volunteer as May is fast approaching.

Without a doubt, the number of people who volunteer to help in any way will determine the future success of the museum.

## FRIEND FOREVER RUSSEL W. LOWDEN 1925—2010

Russ Lowden will be remembered as the “heart and soul” of the Penn Ligonier Railroad Club (PLRRC). From the time Lowden was officially designated the secretary and treasurer of the club in 1977, everyone knew he was the do-everything guy, the person who made things happen.

It was Lowden’s father-in-law who started the club in Latrobe in 1947, holding its meetings in his garage, which housed his huge collection of railroad artifacts and memorabilia and later, the club’s 1950s state-of-the-art HO railroad layout. The PLRR clubhouse on Depot Street was easily identified by the railroad signals in the yard.

When Smith died in 1977, Lowden and his wife, an only child, inherited all of Smith’s property. Keeping the tradition alive, Lowden continued to host the meetings in the garage clubhouse on Friday nights. Regardless of the time of year, Lowden was there in case someone dropped by (and someone usually did), even if a holiday fell on Friday.



*The Lowden smile is evident on this 1948 LVRR rail-fan trip.*

Lowden was known for his wonderful sense of humor, his infectious laugh and love of kids. Over the years numerous youth groups, especially the Boy Scouts, came to see the club’s layout. One of Lowden’s favorite tricks was to greet one of them by shaking his hand firmly, while holding on tightly and pleading “Let go, let go!” Always the comedian, he sought unique ways of complimenting someone. For example, he told a local pianist that she played so many notes that he did not know which ones to listen to. That was his way.

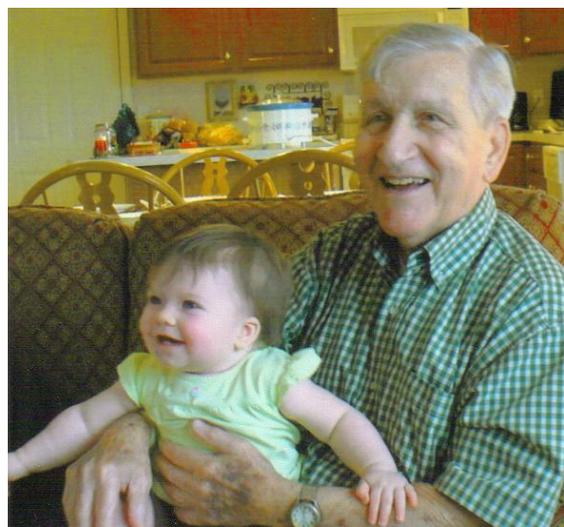
When Lowden expressed concern in his later years about what would happen to his collection since his sons were uninterested in his hobby, the LVRRRA began to consider whether it was feasible for the organization to acquire the collection. When the Richard King Mellon Foundation awarded a grant to the LVRRRA to purchase the collection, Lowden was pleased, knowing that it would be preserved for future generations in this area.

The LVRRRA extends its condolences to the Lowden family and to Norine Allen, a special friend. In memory of Russel W. Lowden, a local legend, the following eulogies were written by two long-time members of the PLRRC:

Russ was small in stature but had a big heart. He always had a smile and had good things to say about everything and everybody. His knowledge of and experience with the train layout in Latrobe and the Pennsylvania Railroad contributed to the continuation of the Penn-Ligonier Railroad Club after his father-in-law, Bill Smith, passed away. In addition, his information about many of the artifacts collected by Smith and himself was valuable in helping the LVRRRA document and catalog his collection. *Written by Bill McCullough*

Russ was a true optimist; he always saw the best in any situation. My earliest recollection of him goes back to the 1950s when I was still a kid. He was a member of the PLRRC and stopped in often. For some reason, I thought he was a minister. Whereas most of the other members smoked and cussed a lot, I don't remember Russ doing either. I believe he was a salesman of some sort back then but eventually became a tower operator like Bill. He didn't hold down a particular position or shift and worked at many of the local switch towers in the area.

I remember one incident that occurred after I was married and had my son Ray. We were at the club and Russ was talking about butterflies. My son showed an interest and Russ volunteered to supply a cage, milkweed and caterpillars (larvae), which then formed cocoons. My son watched them as they broke out of their cocoons and emerged as beautiful Monarch butterflies. He still talks about the experience. *Written by Ray Robb*



*Lowden shown holding great-granddaughter Taylor in July 2009*