



The Liggie

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Why LVRR Locomotives Never Went for a "Spin"

It is reported that some folks insist that the Ligonier Valley Rail Road had at least one turntable and a roundhouse. In fact, the LVRR never had either.

By way of background, a turntable is essentially a rotating bridge set within a circular wooden or concrete pit. The exact center of the turntable is balanced on a pin and bearings that allow the turntable to turn guided by "ring rails" at the edge of the turntable pit. Turning a locomotive on a turntable was called "taking the engine for a spin."

Turntables were turned by hand,

while some were electrically operated.

Under most circumstances a turntable was built in front of a circular building called a roundhouse, where locomotives were stored and given "light repairs." Sometimes, however, a turntable was "free standing" with no roundhouse nearby as at the end of a railroad branch line.

So, how were LVRR engines or entire passenger trains turned around?

They were turned on a three point "wye," just like turning a car around. The LVRR had two such "wyes," one in Latrobe and one in Ligonier.

A train coming into Latrobe would proceed on the "east leg" of the "wye," just to the right of Weiss Furniture. Paralleling



the Pennsylvania Railroad mainline, the train would then back into Latrobe Station. When ready to proceed east toward Ligonier, that same train would proceed on the “west leg” of the “wye” and head east paralleling Lincoln Avenue.

In Ligonier there was a “wye” that put the passenger station in the middle. A passenger train or doodlebug arriving from Latrobe would stop to discharge passengers. The train or doodlebug would then proceed east to a switch and back up across Main Street. The locomotive and it’s consist would back toward the brick engine house, now the Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Church Education and Social complex. At another switch, the locomotive and it’s consist would proceed forward and come on the right side of the Ligonier station. That train would back into the station, ready to make another trip west to Latrobe.

As a docent I try to help visitors understand how “wyes” and turntables work. One thing I stress is that a turntable requires more TLC or “tender loving care.” A “wye,” on the other hand, requires less maintenance but takes more real estate.

The latest LVRR engine house, with five locomotive stalls, was erected in 1923, replacing an older two stall engine house that still partially exists east of the Ligonier Passenger Station, although its original intent is hardly recognizable! Recently I saw a black and white photograph of the 1923 LVRR engine house shortly after the line ceased operations in August of 1952. The caption referred to the engine house as a “square roundhouse.” Talk about a contradiction in terms!

To the best of my knowledge the LVRR never had a turntable or a roundhouse. If I am wrong, however, please let me know with a picture or pictures and I will gladly print a retraction! But I seriously doubt I will have to do so!

Darlington Station

Darlington Station, home of the Ligonier Valley Rail Road Museum, was recently restored to its former glory. Hood Construction, Inc. restored all exterior wood that was deteriorating due to wet weather. That work included the passenger platform roof, the station building itself, and the caboose. That work began in November, 2018, and was suspended until more favorable weather returned.

In addition to the wood restoration some stone masonry work was needed and completed.

The final phase of the project was completed by J.J. Brown Painting & Decorating. Scott Jones and crew painted the entire exterior of the station building, the platform roof, and the caboose in 4 ½ days. The weather was most cooperative this time!

The Station is as bright as a new penny and she never looked better!

Many thanks to Tom Hunter, Chair of the Building Committee, for overseeing this major project!

Help!!!

At a recent Board of Directors meeting, it was suggested that the Liggie Editor might do a series on the passenger stations of the Ligonier Valley Road.

Sound interesting? The editor needs all the help he can muster for this project! If you have pictures or other information on the various LVRR passenger stations, please let him know at cnemckie@gmail.com

You may also call him at 724-834-8534. Any information you can provide will be most appreciated and will help get the “station series” up and running!

Welcome Aboard!

Jennifer Sopko recently joined the Ligonier Valley Rail Road Association Board of Directors.

She is a writer and historian with a love of local history. A Pittsburgh native who grew up in White Oak Borough, her writing projects focus on Western Pennsylvania with the goal of enlightening readers about forgotten and obscure regional history and reinterpreting familiar stories. Jennifer holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from St. Vincent College in Latrobe, Pennsylvania.

Since 2003, Jennifer has written about the Ligonier Valley, Westmoreland County, and Western Pennsylvania for several regional publications including the *Latrobe Bulletin*, *Ligonier Valley Echo*, and *Westmoreland History Magazine*. She is the author of two books published by The History Press: *Ligonier Valley Vignettes: Tales from the Laurel Highlands (2013)* and *Idlewild: History and Memories of Pennsylvania's Oldest Amusement Park (2018)*, a comprehensive history of the Western Pennsylvania railroad picnic grove and its development into a beloved and award-winning amusement park. Her next book will focus on lost amusement parks across Western Pennsylvania.

An active community volunteer, Jennifer served as Co-Chair of the Westmoreland County Historical Society 2015-2016 fund raisers. She also assisted at the

Ligonier Valley Library's Pennsylvania Room, where she was a guest curator for historic photos and memorabilia about Pennsylvania Drive-In Theaters (2009) and Idlewild Park (2019).

She is a member of the John Heinz History Center in Pittsburgh, the Latrobe Historical Society, the National Writers Union, the National Amusement Park Historical Association, and the American Coaster Enthusiasts, Western Pennsylvania Chapter.

A gifted musician, Jennifer plays flute in the Penn Trafford Community Flute Choir and the Penn Trafford Community Band.

We are happy, Jennifer, that you are part of the Ligonier Valley Rail Road Association family!

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Age of Steam Roundhouse

Saturday, July 27, 2019, was a picture-perfect day for a chartered bus trip to Sugarcreek, Ohio, and a visit to the recently-constructed “Age of Steam Roundhouse.” Forty members and friends of the Ligonier Valley Rail Road Association made the journey and all had a most enjoyable time, beginning with a full dinner at the Dutch Valley Restaurant in Sugar Creek.

The roundhouse shelters 20+ steam locomotives, some cosmetically restored and some awaiting full mechanical restoration.

We were blessed to have a most knowledgeable docent who made our visit even more worthwhile.

Thanks to all who went to Sugarcreek, Ohio, on July 27!!!

LVRRA 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.

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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

