

The Liggie

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

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Volume 8 - Issue 4

LVRR CATERS TO PASSENGER TRAFFIC

When the LVRR began to operate in 1877, the line originated at the wye in Latrobe near today's Weiss Furniture where it interchanged with the Pennsylvania Railroad. From there it continued along what is now Lincoln Avenue past the steel mills and then southeast to Kingston where it then followed the Loyahanna Creek through Chestnut Ridge and Idlewild Park to Ligonier.

Much has been written about the impact this short-line railroad had on the economic development of Ligonier Valley. The importance of the LVRR, however, as a passenger train should not be minimized. The railroad affected the lives of people living not only in the valley, but also throughout southwestern Pennsylvania by providing a means of reliable and economical transportation that up to this time had been unimaginable.

People from the Pittsburgh area could now more easily travel to Ligonier Valley, which had already established the reputation of being a tourist attraction because of its "unexcelled scenery, invigorating mountain air and crystal spring water." It also meant that Ligonier Valley residents could easily travel to Latrobe in 30 to 40 minutes, a trip which, before the railroad, was at least a three-hour ride by horse and buggy. Even more unbelievable, they could travel to Pittsburgh in less time than it had taken them to travel to Latrobe before the railroad.

E-VERSION OF THE LIGGIE

If you prefer to access the newsletter in electronic format rather than to receive a hard copy, please notify the office at 724-238-7819 or send an e-mail to lvrra@verizon.net.

Having served more than nine million passengers over its 75-year history, the LVRR from the beginning recognized the importance of catering to its passengers. The published schedule of the LVRR between Latrobe and Ligonier included as many as 11 passenger stops along its 10.6 mile line, even though not all of them were active at the same time. The train also stopped for individuals who flagged it down and made extra stops to drop off passengers. Although two of the 11 stops provided only a platform, the other nine, which varied greatly in size and structure, offered shelter for passengers.

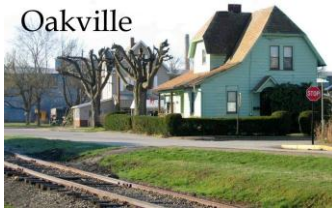
LVRR's original station in Latrobe was built around 1877 next to Alexandria Street along the railroad tracks. It stood across the street from what is today the Family Video store. In 1903 when the Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR) elevated its mainline tracks to eliminate all the grade crossings in downtown Latrobe, the LVRR had to elevate its tracks to continue interchanging with the PRR. At that time, the LVRR also extended its passenger siding to the PRR station in Latrobe. The LVRR shared the same platform with eastbound PRR passengers but accessed it from the opposite side.



The LVRR consist is located on the south side of the passenger shelter that it shared with eastbound PRR traffic. In the foreground is the Latrobe freight yard of the PRR.

It is uncertain whether the LVRR rented space in the Latrobe station or the PRR staff accommodated LVRR customers. Research will continue toward unraveling this question.

Oakville



The Oakville Station, built in 1899, was located 1.2 miles from the Latrobe wye at the intersection of Harrison Avenue

and Grant Street. This station, which served the residents of Oakville and the nearby steel mills, was designed to accommodate passengers on the first floor and provide housing for the station agent on the second floor. According to the March 7, 1900, *Ligonier Echo*, the first agent at Oakville was Cummins Kimmel, a LVRR track foreman. The Oakville Station was sold in the 1920s and converted into a private residence which stands today across from the Nut House on Lincoln Avenue near the Pond Restaurant.

The Osborne Station, located 2.1 miles from the Latrobe wye, was built next to the intersection of the LVRR tracks and Raymond Avenue Extension, east of today's Latrobe Skating Center. No photographs of this station are known to exist, but a now-deceased local resident, Paul Carey, whose family owned the surrounding farm, recalled that the station was just a small building. Sometime after 1938 when this stop was removed from the schedule, the building collapsed. Carey remembered seeing the carcass of a railroad baggage cart in the basement under the debris. No trace of this station exists today.

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HOURS OF OPERATION

11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Wednesday through Saturday

Please consult the website for changes.

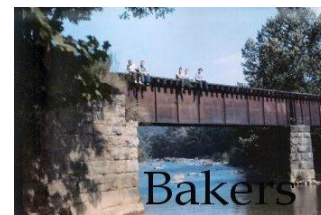
Located 3.2 miles from the Latrobe wye, the Kingston Station was built next to the Loyalhanna Creek across the tracks from the



Latrobe Water Works, which today is the site of the Latrobe Municipal Authority. The station served the Water Works, the

Soisson Brick Yard, which stood next to it, the Peters Paper Company, currently the site of the Kennametal Kingston plant, and the residents of Kingston. Built from blueprints the same as or similar to the ones used for Oakville, Kingston served both as a station for passengers and a residence for the station agent. After the LVRR went out of business, this station was torn down to make room for westbound Route 30.

Nothing more than a platform, the Bakers stop,



5.7 miles from the Latrobe wye, was included in early LVRR schedules. It was located halfway through the Loyalhanna

Gorge near the spur to the Booth and Flinn quarry on the south side of the Loyalhanna Creek. The cut-stone abutments for the trestle bridge that spanned the Loyalhanna Creek on the Booth and Flinn siding can still be seen along westbound Route 30. This passenger stop accommodated the few families who lived and worked in that area.

Located 6.5 miles from the Latrobe wye, the Longbridge Station was located near the communities of McCance and Longbridge. Until age nine, John Vucina lived in Longbridge

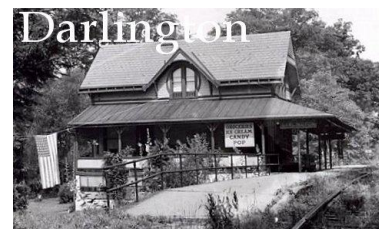


where his mother ran a boarding house for Booth and Flinn quarry workers. He remembers that

before the bridge was raised to pass over the railroad tracks, the original Lincoln Highway intersected the railroad on the same grade. Vucina said that Longbridge Station was built at that intersection by the quarry. The one-room frame building also doubled as a grocery store for the neighborhood and was run by a

McCance. Even though the building which housed the station no longer exists, some of the nearby houses from that time still stand today. The station remained in operation until the Last Run in 1952.

The Darlington Station was located at the western entrance to Idlewild Park, 7.2 miles from the Latrobe wye. This station, which was built in 1896, stood out from the other LVRR stations because of its Victorian architectural style, which included curved windows and decorative trim. Like Oakville and Kingston, this station also housed the station agent and his family. Ella Betz Wuchina, granddaughter of Vivian Snyder, the station agent during the 1940s, lived there along with her grandparents and her aunt. She described the building as having two bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs, a kitchen in the basement, and a living room behind the station lobby on the first floor, where passengers bought tickets.



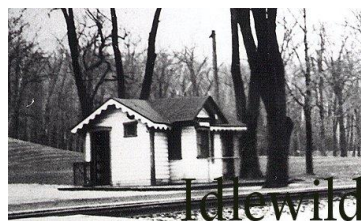
The Darlington Station also doubled as the park store where inbound Idlewild patrons could buy picnic supplies. The station later evolved into a convenience store where local customers purchased bread, milk, soda and, as John Vucina remembers, lollipops with edible handles. When the railroad ceased operations in 1952, Idlewild Park took ownership and used the building for employee housing until it donated the building to the LVRRA in 2006. It now serves as the LVRR Museum.

The Liggie is published quarterly for Friends of the LVRR.

Editor — Bob Stutzman

Associate Editor — Carolyn H. Dillon

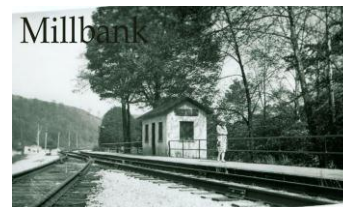
(New editors will assume publication of *The Liggie* starting in 2013.)



The station in Idlewild, 7.6 miles from the Latrobe wye, was once billed as the smallest station in

Pennsylvania and was staffed only during the picnic season. Today it stands on its original site near the bumper car ride in the park. About twice its original size, it now serves as a hospitality office for large groups visiting Idlewild and a small museum. Displayed in it is a collection of LVRR photographs and memorabilia and outside are several cast-iron railroad signs.

The Millbank stop was located near the site of today's entrance to Idlewild Park, 8.0 miles from the Latrobe wye. This stop accommodated the local residents and the Crescent Pipeline Pumping Station, which stood on the site where today's Flea-Tique stands. Paul Fry, who lived in Millbank



in the 1960s, remembers walking past the abandoned building on his way to and from swimming at the Idlewild pool. According to Fry, Millbank was a 4' X 8' brick building with a bench inside along the back wall for waiting passengers. Dean Shirey, who grew up on a nearby dairy farm, remembers delivering milk cans to Millbank to be shipped to Pittsburgh. Idlewild demolished the building about 20 years ago to make room for its current entrance plaza.

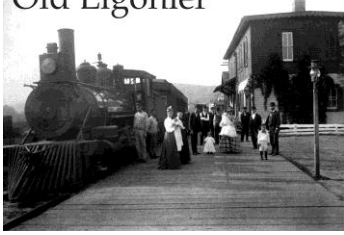


This photograph of the Last Run was taken by Dean Shirey at the Ice Pond just west of Bells.

The Bells stop, consisting of only a platform, was located 8.9 miles from the Latrobe wye where the railroad crossed Two-Mile Run Road. No photograph of it is known to exist. Nearby was the railroad spur to the Consolidated Ice

Company, situated on the property currently owned by the Camp and Conference Center.

Old Ligonier



The original Ligonier Station, 10.0 miles from the Latrobe wye, was a two story frame building that housed both

the passenger lobby and the offices of the railroad. In 1909, when the LVRR decided to build a new station, the frame structure was moved across the tracks and repurposed into the railroad freight station.

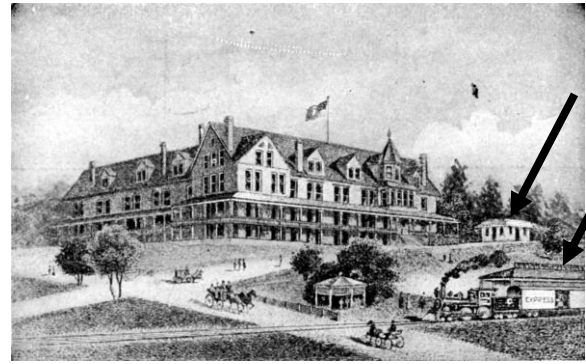
At a cost of more than \$50,000, the new Ligonier Station was designed to be impressive as well as functional. The November 24, 1909, *Ligonier Echo* stated, "The beautiful, modern station built of granite and terra cotta resembling



granite [will be] possibly the finest and best equipped railroad station for any town the size of Ligonier." The building was officially opened in 1910 with the baggage and waiting rooms and the ticket office on the first floor and LVRR's headquarters on the second.

In 1957 the Ligonier Station was sold to the Pennsylvania Game Commission, which resold it in 2002 to the Ligonier Valley School District for its administrative offices. The original frame station still stands along Railroad Street and serves as a garage and maintenance building for the Ligonier Valley School District.

In 1899 when the LVRR built a line east of Ligonier to support the Byers-Allen Sawmill and interchange with the Pittsburgh, Westmoreland and Somerset Railroad, it added a summer station near Frank's Hotel, a popular tourist attraction located on the site of today's Ramada Inn.



This picture includes Frank's Hotel, the ticket office adjacent to it and the summer station in the foreground.

The summer station was a covered platform alongside the tracks, located on the site of today's Chestnut Ridge Family Medicine practice on West Loyalhanna Street. A ticket office, located next door to the hotel, still stands today in the back yard of a residence on South Fairfield Street, near where it originally stood in the early 1900s.



Undoubtedly, the LVRR made most of its money from the industries that sprang up along its line, but from the beginning the railroad recognized the added value of passenger business. The expense of building and maintaining 11 stops and manning at least seven of them along its 10.6 mile road, as well as the cost of developing Idlewild Park to attract tourists to Ligonier Valley, reveals how committed the Mellon family was to promoting its railroad passenger business.

POTTHOFF PRESENTS RESEARCH TO THE CHESTNUT RIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

On September 18, 2012, LVRR Board Secretary Bill Potthoff presented the results of his research of the 1912 wreck on the Ligonier Line to the Chestnut Ridge Historical Society. Although the research is unfinished, Potthoff will share his committee's findings with other interested parties. Please call the museum at 724-238-7819 for details.

Friend forever – in memorial

Donald Conte

NEW LVRRA DIRECTORS REPLACE WALLACE AND STUTZMAN

The terms of two directors will be completed as of December 31, 2012. Both Pat Wallace and Bob Stutzman have been recognized as leaders in fulfilling the goals of the LVRRA.

Tom Hunter, a life-long resident of Ligonier Valley, has been named to replace Wallace. Hunter is a retired Verizon employee, the grandson of a PRR express agent in Ligonier and a frequent volunteer at LVRRA functions.

Mimi Owens, a Greensburg resident, will replace Stutzman. She is a job counselor for the Title V program administered by the Westmoreland County Community College and a member of the adjunct faculty in the English Department. An avid student of history, she has been helping to research the 1912 accident on the Ligonier line.

The board is looking forward to the new ideas and enthusiasm that these two people will bring to the LVRRA.

LIGONIER VALLEY TOURISM INCREASES AS TRANSPORTATION EVOLVES

Motivated by the increased movement of people through Ligonier Valley spurred by the completion of the Philadelphia — Pittsburgh Turnpike, John Ramsey laid out a plan for the town of Ligonier in 1817, which included four blocks built around a public square. The town grew as farmers throughout the valley came to trade produce for supplies and stagecoaches stopped to give passengers time to eat and rest. By the time the town incorporated into a borough in 1834, it was thriving as the “crossroads of the valley,” surrounded by the beautiful Laurel Mountains to the east and the Chestnut Ridge to the west. Soon Ligonier Valley gained the reputation of being one of the most beautiful spots in western Pennsylvania.

In the early 1800s, Thomas Seaton recognized the need for a stagecoach stop in Ligonier. By 1824, he had built Ligonier’s pioneer hotel, the Ligonier House. It stood across from the public square for the next 147 years, until it was torn down in 1965 to make room for the Ligonier Valley Library.



The Ligonier House, built in 1824 as a stagecoach stop, underwent two major expansions by the early 1900s.

Before 1850, many well-known families from Pittsburgh had already begun to retreat to the valley to spend their summers, creating a need for accommodations in and around Ligonier. As a result, an addition was built onto the back of the Ligonier House to meet the increasing demand. However, once the Pennsylvania Railroad bypassed Ligonier when it extended its tracks from Altoona to Pittsburgh in 1852, tourism decreased as people who had traveled the Philadelphia — Pittsburgh Turnpike now chose to travel instead by the railroad.

The economy in Ligonier began to recover in 1877 after Judge Thomas Mellon built the LVRR between Latrobe and Ligonier, thus creating easy access to the valley. Industries, including gravel, lumber and coal, began to flourish when rail service became available. Also, the influx of travelers and tourists into Ligonier began to dramatically increase when the once difficult three-to-four hour trip by horse and buggy from Latrobe, which had cost \$2, now took only 30 minutes on the LVRR at the cost of 44 cents.

In 1878, Judge Mellon developed Idlewild Park to further increase patronage on his railroad. The park spanned 350 acres and included among other amenities, baseball fields, tennis courts, three lakes, a bandstand and great dining halls. Word quickly spread about the fresh mountain air, spring waters and beautiful vistas that abounded in Ligonier and Idlewild Park. William G. Irwin, in his 1898 book *Historical Ligonier Valley*, wrote:

From the opening of the [rail]road . . . the development of the valley has been rapid. When the toot of the locomotive echoed through the mountain gaps and awakened the valley from its long lethargic sleep there ensued

a period of prosperity, and to the present day this has continued It is doubtful whether any other section of our state presents so many charms as are shown to the traveler in the ten miles from Latrobe to Ligonier.

The appeal of Idlewild Park coupled with accolades such as this one written by Irwin renewed the enthusiasm of tourists to visit Ligonier Valley, especially during the summer months.

THE MISSION OF THE LVRRA Ligonier Valley Rail Road Association

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

RECENT CONTRIBUTIONS

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

Linda McKenna Boxx — LVRR ticket inherited from her mother, Wilma McKenna

Robert Boyer — Four-track signal from a PRR stanchion

Thomas Hunter — Family genealogy documenting James W Hunter, grandfather of Thomas, as an express agent for the PRR at Ligonier

Nancy Eby Richards — Collection of newspaper clippings, including an original *Ligonier Echo* dated July 10, 1912, and several vintage photographs of Ligonier scenes

Debera Ulm — Oil painting of a B&O engine painted by her father, John “Dink” Ulm, retired Art Director of the McKeesport, Pennsylvania, *Daily News*

Frank Reno — Railroad spike commemorating the Last Run of the LVRR



The Ligonier House as it appeared in 1908 after it was expanded for the second time

As tourism in Ligonier exploded over the next 20 years, so, too, did the number of hotels and boarding houses in town and throughout the valley. By the early 1900s, LVRR schedules boasted that Ligonier tourists could choose from “five first-class hotels.” The already expansive Ligonier House built a turret, giving it a Victorian appearance, after adding two more floors to its original building, greatly increasing for the second time the number of rooms for tourists. The hotel, which began as a stagecoach stop, now advertised itself as being one of the best shaded hotels in western Pennsylvania with wide porches, a beautiful lawn and a pleasant view of the public square.



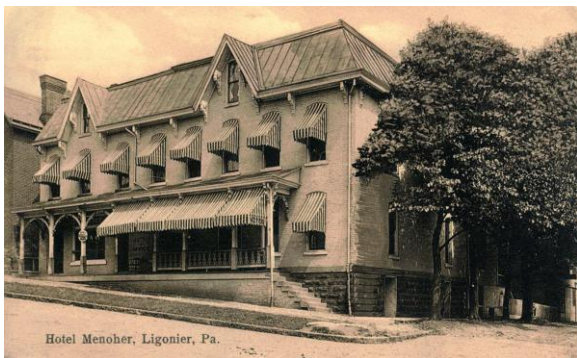
This 1941 postcard of the Breniser Hotel shows the large wrap-around porch where guests could relax and visit.

In 1900, Peter B. Breniser built what he advertised as the “finest and most modern hotel in town” across the square from the Ligonier House on the site where the Town Hall now stands. Although information about this hotel is scarce, photographs of it suggest that the hotel was spacious enough to accommodate large numbers of guests. The hotel had its own ice house and livery stable, as well as a bowling alley that was later converted into a billiards parlor. The Breniser Hotel remained in operation until 1967 when it was torn down.



The National Hotel as it appeared after additional rooms were added during the latter part of the 19th century

The National Hotel was located one square east of the public park and is now occupied by the VFW. In his book, William G. Irwin also praised the National Hotel: "The bill-of-fare offered at the National always includes the best that the market affords, and summer visitors who stop at this hotel are sure to return again." The building that housed the National Hotel still stands on East Main Street. It is the only hotel from this period that remains. Early photographs of the National Hotel depict it as looking almost the same as the building does today.



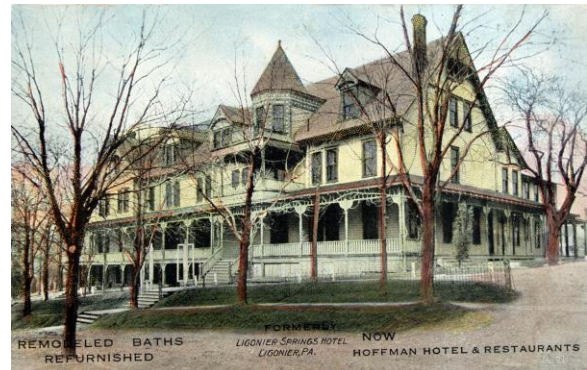
This photograph of the Menoher Hotel was taken after the hotel's expansion. It was later renamed the Commercial Hotel.

The Hotel Menoher was built around 1892 at the corner of Loyalhanna and Market streets, where the municipal parking lot is today. Irwin wrote that this hotel enjoyed "liberal summer patronage" and that visitors who stayed there found "rest and solitude." As tourism increased, the Menoher was also enlarged to accommodate more guests.

During these boom years of tourism, Frank's Hotel was perhaps Ligonier's most popular destination. Located on Loyalhanna Street,

where today's Ramada Inn stands, it overlooked the Loyalhanna and the lowlands.

The hotel advertised over 100 rooms and accommodations for 150 guests. Its amenities included tennis, bowling, a shooting gallery, an ice cream parlor, a telegraph office, elegant grounds and broad porches. During the summer, the hotel advertised a ballroom and its own orchestra. The hotel was also noted for fine dining.



Even though Frank's Hotel changed names several times, the hotel itself remained basically unchanged.

Because of its popularity, the LVRR even installed a summer station near Frank's Hotel to further accommodate tourists. Over the years, Frank's changed ownership several times as well as its name. It was also known as the Ligonier Springs Hotel and Sanitarium, the Hoffman House and the Fort Ligonier Hotel.



This photograph of the Park Hotel depicts it in its heyday. One section of the original building still stands today.

Also popular among tourists were outlying resorts, such as the Park Hotel and Cottages, located on the property now owned by Bethlen Home, and Kissell's Springs Hotel, which was one mile east of today's town of Waterford. Kissell's Springs, surrounded by forest and streams, especially appealed to outdoorsmen who liked to hunt and fish.



Kissell's Springs Hotel was destroyed by fire in 1915.

LVRRA management also actively encouraged local farmers to offer room and board to visitors. According to LVRRA schedules as early as the 1920s, in addition to the five first-rate hotels in Ligonier, there were several excellent private boarding houses throughout the valley.



During the peak of tourism, hotel buggies lined up at the Ligonier Station to welcome inbound passengers and deliver them to Ligonier hotels, boarding houses and outlying resorts.

Today, it is hard to believe that the town of Ligonier with a population of 1500 had accommodations for 500 guests in the early 1900s. An article in the July 3, 1912, *Ligonier Echo* conveys just how popular tourism was at this time. The *Echo* recorded that 8,000 people attended a B.P.O. Elks picnic at Idlewild on the Tuesday of the previous week, requiring eight PRR trains, several LVRRA trains and many automobiles to transport those attending. One thousand of the picnickers bought a train ticket to travel from Idlewild to Ligonier to have dinner. The *Echo* reported that Ligonier Springs Hotel alone served 400 people that day.

The magnitude of this early tourism resulted largely because of Judge Thomas Mellon and his sons' foresight in building the railroad as a financial investment and developing Idlewild Park to promote tourism in Ligonier Valley and thus increase patronage on the LVRRA.

A tip of the hat to the staff of the Pennsylvania Room of the Ligonier Valley Library who offered assistance and gathered the hotel photographs for this article

NEW MEMBERS

Richard Auman, Jr.
Barry Banker
Jim Bendel
Tom Freeman

CALENDAR OF LVRRA EVENTS

April 27 — Model Train Home Tour
June 1 — Bus Trip to Walkersville
Southern RR

THE LVRRA WELCOMES EMPLOYEE MARY BUSH

Mary Bush has joined the staff at the Ligonier Valley Rail Road Museum through the Title V program. Bush is an avid reader, loves to cook and previously was employed in the nursing and food-service fields. The Title V program enables participants to retrain and gain experience in other careers. Welcome aboard!

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