

The Liggie

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

March 2012

Volume 8 - Issue 1

THE DAUGHTER OF A SURVIVOR OF THE 1912 TRAIN WRECK RECALLS HER MOTHER'S STORY

One of the most horrific accidents in local history occurred July 5, 1912, on the Mill Creek Branch of the Ligonier Valley Rail Road when a fully-loaded passenger coach being pushed north from Ligonier collided with a south-bound engine pulling a 40-car coal train. Twenty-three passengers and crewmen died in that accident. Miraculously, more than 20 people survived, including a 16-year-old girl, Bessie Hoon. In a recent interview Hoon's daughter, Mary Lou (Naugle) Mitchell, shared her mother's memories of the accident.

On that fateful day, as Hoon boarded the train in Ligonier to go to Wilpen to visit an aunt, she unexpectedly saw her uncle, George Tosh, sitting next to a window. Tosh offered his window seat to Hoon, but knowing that he liked to sit next to the window, she declined his offer.

Five minutes after the train had departed and rounded the only blind curve on the Mill Creek Branch, the conductor, Charles Kuhn, saw in the distance an on-coming coal train. Even though Kuhn was able to signal the engineer to reverse the direction of the train, it was unable to escape the speed and momentum of the on-coming coal train.

Upon impact with the coal train, the passenger coach split in half lengthwise and Hoon fell to the ground between the tracks. She remembered at least one, perhaps two loaded coal cars passing over her. Hoon's uncle, who was sitting next to the window, died instantly in the crash.

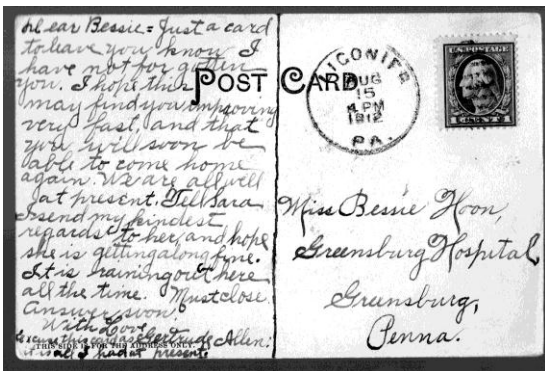


Bessie Hoon as a young woman

When Hoon arrived at the Latrobe Hospital, the attendants believed that she had died en route and laid her body on a grassy bank with other bodies to be hosed down in an attempt to remove some of the coal dust and grime. When she was loaded onto a gurney, her arm fell down and as an attendant lifted it back onto the gurney, he felt a pulse. Thus, the story of Hoon's improbable survival began.

With a severely injured leg that at one time doctors considered amputating, Hoon spent several weeks recovering in the Latrobe Hospital until she was transferred to the Greensburg Hospital. There a Doctor Silvis so successfully replaced her original kneecap with a silver one that Hoon never even walked with a limp. Hoon often remarked that the doctor's name was easy for her to remember because of the similarity between the name "Silvis" and the word "silver." Traces of ashes from the accident remained embedded in Hoon's face for the rest of her life. In spite of her serious condition, Hoon remembered that Richard King Mellon had visited her in the hospital.

Hoon kept the dress that she was wearing the day of the accident. Although her mother, Mamie Tosh Hoon, washed the dress, she never mended it. About ten years ago, Mitchell donated that dress to the Ligonier Valley Historical Society along with newspapers pertaining to the accident that her mother had saved.



A get-well wish for Bessie Hoon, dated August 15, 1912, almost seven weeks after the accident

Hoon also kept all of the get-well cards that friends and relatives had sent to her during her recovery. Mitchell, who treasures these mementos of her mother's survival, recently loaned the cards to the LVRRA to scan for its archives.

Being able to record such stories as this one involving one of the survivors of the train wreck enables the LVRR Museum to create a living history for future generations. The museum is indebted to Mitchell for sharing her mother's story.

After graduating from Ligonier High School in 1914, Hoon attended the Indiana Normal School in Indiana, Pennsylvania. She taught in the Ligonier School District for 40 years. Hoon married Fowler Elmer Naugle, and they had two daughters, Mary Lou (who married Glenn E. Mitchell) and Martha Jane. Hoon died at age 69.



A recent photograph of Mary Lou Mitchell, daughter of Bessie Hoon Naugle

CONTACT INFORMATION

Ligonier Valley Rail Road Association
 3032 Idlewild Hill
 PO Box 21
 Ligonier, PA 15658
 724-238-7819
 lvrra@verizon.net
 www.lvrra.org

The Liggie is published quarterly
 for Friends of the LVRR.
 Editor — Bob Stutzman
 Associate Editor — Carolyn H. Dillon

LOCAL RESIDENTS CONTRIBUTE TO THE LVRR MUSEUM

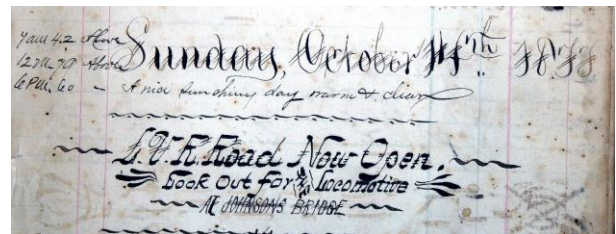
The LVRR Museum continues to grow and thrive, often as a result of someone from the Ligonier Valley donating bits of history related to the LVRR. Mary Lou Mitchell's interview has resulted in her mother's survival of the 1912 train accident on the Mill Creek Branch being recorded for posterity. The postcards she allowed the museum to scan are interesting in themselves, and the notes written on them add further information about the time period. Ironically, already in LVRR Museum's archives among the hospital admission forms that Tom Weimer donated to the museum in 2005 was the admission form for Bessie Hoon.

LATROBE HOSPITAL ADMISSION BLANK	
Ward _____	Room _____
Name _____	<i>Bessie Hoon</i>
Address _____	<i>Ligonier</i>
Date of Admission _____	Hour _____
Age <i>16</i> _____	M. S. W. _____ M. F. _____
Nationality _____	<i>American</i>
Occupation _____	<i>Home</i>
Where Employed _____	
Religion _____	<i>Presb.</i>
Name and address _____	<i>Edw. Hoon</i>
And phone of friend _____	<i>Ligonier</i>
Had patient money _____	<i>Brought on head</i>
or valuables _____	<i>arms</i>
Where left _____	<i>cut leg, ankle - knee</i>
What and whose conveyance _____	<i>half way to church</i>
Rate _____	
Provisional Diagnosis _____	
I have examined _____	
and recommended h. _____ for treatment to _____ dept.	
	Ex. Physician.
Admitted by _____	

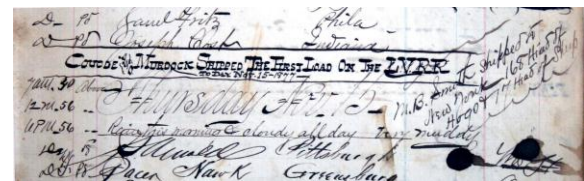
The hospital admission form for Bessie Hoon lists her injuries as being "bruised on head and arms, cut leg, ankle - knee half way to thigh."

A call from Shirley Iscrupe, Pennsylvania Room Archivist at the

Ligonier Library, has led to the LVRR Museum's obtaining further information about the formative days of the LVRR. Iscrupe brought to the attention of the museum staff the existence of a guest register kept by the Ligonier House, a hotel that, during the time of the LVRR, stood on the site on which the Ligonier Library now stands. In the register, which is dated August 1876 to September 1878, the desk attendant wrote daily notes about the weather conditions and current events, such as the institution of martial law in Pittsburgh to quell a strike. Iscrupe conveyed that this register contained information that pertained directly to the LVRR.



One entry dated October 14, 1877, states "L.V.R. Road Now Open. Look out for the locomotive at Johnson's [sic.] Bridge." The bridge referred to here would have been the bridge at Kingston located near the Johnston house on the old state road. The entry establishes that the railroad tracks were being used as early as October 1877, six weeks prior to the official first run on December 1, 1877.



Additionally, an entry dated November 15, 1877, proves that the LVRR was transporting commercial goods earlier than once thought. The entry states,

“Covode and Murdock shipped the first load on the LVRR today Nov. 15, 1877.” A note in the margin also conveys that “M. B. Smith shipped to New York 168 head of hogs and 77 head of sheep.”

These entries in the Ligonier House register are significant in that they are the first pieces of evidence to indicate that rail traffic was taking place prior to the official first run.

Although these entries do not change the previously accepted history of the LVRR in a dramatic way, they do add additional information about its operation.

In an effort to better share the hotel register with the public, the Ligonier Valley Rail Road Association and Pennsylvania Room are in the process of digitizing the entire hotel register. When the project is completed, both locations will have a digital copy of the Ligonier House hotel register to share with students of Ligonier history.

SIGNIFICANT AWARDS TO LVRRA BOLSTER THE CABOOSE RESTORATION PROJECT

Two generous donations have been given to the LVRRA for the restoration of its bobber caboose. The Ligonier Valley Endowment awarded to the LVRRA one of its grants given annually to non-profit organizations. The second donation was made by an anonymous benefactor, whose major concern is the restoration of the roof of the caboose. Because of these gifts, the LVRRA will be able to begin this restoration project in the near future.

The Board of Directors of the LVRRA and the Friends of the LVRR wish to extend their heartfelt gratitude to the Ligonier Valley Endowment and to the anonymous donor for these generous contributions.

UNUSUAL VISITOR TOURS THE MUSEUM



Lois Neiderhiser, LVRR Museum gift-shop attendant, greets a most unusual visitor.

NEW MEMBERS SINCE DECEMBER 1, 2011

John Davis
Jessie & John Fitchwell
William Gindlesperger
Wake Harrington
Mary Lou Mitchell
Wallace Peabody
Joshua Wiechmann

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Bill McCullough — President
724-238-5859
Bob Stutzman — Vice President
724-537-2647
Bill Potthoff — Secretary
724-532-5564
Art McMullen — Treasurer
724-593-7277
Dave Byers — Director
Tom Donchez — Director
Paul Fry — Director
Armour Mellon — Director
Pat Wallace — Director
Lisa Hays — Emerita
Janet Hudson — Emerita
Al Pilz — Emeritus
Ralph Scalise — Emeritus
Bill Stablein — Emeritus

RECENT CONTRIBUTIONS

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

Anonymous — Original picture post card of the Pittsburgh, Westmoreland and Somerset Railroad (PW&S) tracks near the site of Fort Ligonier, and original PW&S cancelled check dated 1914, payable to the County Trust Company

Rev. Albert Kovacs — Sample of anthracite coal and a piece of slate impregnated with numerous fossils

Thomas Freeman, Jr. — Numerous negatives of railroad scenes taken during the 1940s and 1950s, inherited from his father, Thomas, Sr.

Mary Lou Mitchell — Photograph of her mother, Bessie Hoon, a survivor of the 1912 train accident, and copies of the get-well cards sent to Hoon in the hospital while she was recovering from her injuries

Rose Showalter — A book entitled *Latrobe and the Ligonier Valley* by Rachel E. Smith

Friend forever – in memorial

**E. Kay Myers
John C. Volpe**

FRIENDS OF THE LVRR LOSES TWO LONG-TIME MEMBERS

Two long-time Friends of the LVRR have recently passed away. E. Kay Myers, 1926-2012, spent most of his life in the Latrobe and Ligonier area. Myers was most recently known as a columnist for the *Latrobe Bulletin* and, along with his wife Gertrude, co-publisher of the *Around Latrobe* magazine. In writing about his teenage years in his column "...Thinking Back," Myers frequently described his escapades with friends. He wrote about their sled riding down Spring Street in Latrobe and over the tracks sometimes as far as the armory. Most

memorable was his tale about one of his friends sledding under a railroad car on the tracks.

Perhaps growing up in Latrobe so close to the railroad influenced Myers to be the ardent supporter of the LVRRA that he was. In his column, Myers frequently reported on upcoming LVRRA events and promoted the gift shop at the museum by listing items sold there. He also regularly attended the LVRRA annual dinners and galas.

John Volpe (1915-2012) was a proud former employee of the Ligonier Valley Rail Road. During his years with the railroad, he worked as a freight crewman, an engine-house mechanic, a truck driver and a telephone pole climber. He felt honored to have been the brakeman on the Last Run of the LVRR. LVRR also honored Volpe with a letter of commendation for averting an accident when he chased down, jumped on and stopped a runaway railroad car in Ligonier.

During his later years, through a series of interviews, Volpe shared his first-hand experiences of working on the railroad with the LVRRA. Such information is invaluable in recreating the past history of the railroad. In December 2007, Volpe also donated his pole climbing spikes to the LVRRA.



John Volpe during a June 2006 visit to the St. Clair Street mini-museum in Ligonier identifies himself in a photograph on display.

The LVRRA greatly appreciates the contributions that these two Friends made to the museum. They will be fondly remembered.

MODEL-TRAIN LAYOUT TOUR SCHEDULED FOR APRIL 28

The fourth annual model-train layout tour is scheduled for Saturday, April 28, 2012, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. The 2012 committee, chaired by Bret Pohland, has put together another great tour that showcases eight layouts at six different locations, including four private homes.

Huber Hall in Latrobe will again be the anchor location for the tour where several exhibits and vendor tables will be set up. The Pittsburgh Independent Hi Railers will display its four-track modular O gauge layout, which measures 30 by 40 feet and depicts various railroad-scenes. New to Huber Hall will be the Somerset Laurel Highlands Model Railroad Club, which will exhibit its collection of various gauge model trains. Because of its popularity two years ago, the Terrell M. Jacobs Ring #7, affiliate of the national Circus Model Builders, will return with a completely new circus setting, including a big top, wagons, tents and animals. Duane Miller, a local member of the group, will also display his private collection of circus railroad cars and cages.

One of the vendors at Huber Hall will be Fantastic Fotographica, a popular enterprise owned by Harry and Bob Frye. Their vintage photographs of the LVRR as well as of Latrobe and surrounding areas always draw a positive response. Also of interest to railroad buffs will be the Penn-Ligonier Railroad Club's flea-market table, where used model trains and accessories will be sold. The LVRRRA will sell various items from its museum gift shop, including model trains, denim shirts and hats, and tee shirts. For the convenience of all attending the event,

the Firemen of Latrobe Hose Company #1, owners of Huber Hall, will provide sandwiches and drinks throughout the day for anyone interested in purchasing lunch.

One of the two layouts in the Greensburg area will feature a 1200 foot loop of 7 1/2-inch-gauge track, which extends around the perimeter of the host's property. A group of backyard railroading buddies will exhibit both steam and electric engines along with rail cars, which, weather permitting, will transport anyone interested on a ride around the loop.

The second Greensburg host will display his extensive collection of train sets and accessories in standard, G and O gauges. Additionally, on display will be two operating layouts.



This G gauge layout in Greensburg features a collection of teddy bears.

The standard gauge train will loop around a layout that includes four models of the Ligonier Station, all



reissues of Lionel's 1930s edition. The G gauge layout will include a train custom-built to accommodate a collection of Steiff teddy bears.

In Harrison City, guests will also be treated to two layouts, one N gauge and one HO. The N gauge layout features a coal mine and a series of tunnels, three bridges, and a town with a factory and a gas station on the outskirts. The HO layout includes a graded roadbed, an engine house, a railroad station and a coal tippie. As a bonus, the host's wife will display her miniature doll house.



This multi-level HO layout revolves around a town setting.

The Ligonier layout features several N gauge trains running on three different levels through various tunnels, over bridges and around a golf course community. The layout incorporates a mountain, which is impressive because of its size and its gradation of color, which gives it a very realistic appearance.



In this photograph of the Ligonier layout, three levels of track are visible.

As an added bonus, tour participants will have free admission to the LVRR

Museum at the restored Darlington Station on the day of the tour. Those attending can appreciate the workmanship and architecture of the museum, as well as the museum's collection of railroad artifacts and memorabilia.

The cost of a ticket is \$15 per adult and \$5 per child under 16. Only 300 tickets will be sold. Tickets may be ordered by sending a check payable to the LVRRRA and earmarked "layout tour" to LVRRRA, PO Box 21, Ligonier, PA 15658. Orders must be received by April 21. Include a note indicating the number of adult and juvenile tickets you wish to purchase along with your mailing address, phone number and e-address, if applicable. Tickets, detailed maps and directions to the layouts will be returned through the mail. Participants are encouraged to visit as many locations as possible in the sequence of their own choosing.

CALENDAR OF LVRRRA EVENTS

April 28 — Model Train Tour
May 26 — Annual Dinner
June 30 — Mill Creek Branch Field Trip

THE MISSION OF THE LVRRRA 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

LOCAL AUTHORS USE THE LVRR MUSEUM AS A SETTING FOR A PROMOTIONAL FILM

This past December, the LVRR Museum hosted two local writers who were interested in using the museum and its caboose for a promotional film. Mary Marcum, the writer who originated the idea for the project, is in the initial stages of developing a marketable children's program. In addition to being an author, Andrea Niapas is a film producer.

Marcum felt that the restored Darlington Station and its caboose would mirror both the atmosphere and setting that she intends to create as a backdrop for her program. Several people, including three children, accompanied the authors to the station to serve as cast members and happily became part of the scenes Niapas captured on film. The enthusiasm that all participants reflected during their visit is sure to enhance the success of the day's filming.

The cast members of the film included Eric Harris, Stephanie Marcum, Ricky Stahl, Ellie Stewart, and Jacob Withrow. All of the project participants enjoyed looking at the exhibits and exploring the caboose during their time at the museum.

Marcum and Niapas were happy to be able to use this local historic resource for their project and were quite appreciative of the staff's cooperation. In turn, the LVRR Museum staff was pleased to be able to accommodate the local residents and hope that they will return to the museum for further filming as this project evolves.

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 lorra@verizon.net.

NEW INFORMATION CLARIFIES DETAILS OF THE RAILWAY EXPRESS OPERATION IN LIGONIER

An article on the Railway Express Agency (REA) printed in the September 2011 edition of *The Liggie* explored the REA's presence in the Ligonier Valley during the time of the LVRR. Since that article was written, additional information has been obtained.

Bill Gindlesperger, a former resident of Ligonier Valley and a retired minister living in North Carolina, contacted the LVRRRA after reading the REA article online. As the son of Wilbert Gindlesperger, who was the REA agent in Ligonier when the LVRR shut down in 1952, Bill Gindlesperger was able to offer first-hand information about the REA's operation in Ligonier. Bill does not recall express shipments ever being made from Latrobe to Ligonier via rail. According to him, all REA shipments were picked up in Latrobe and delivered to Ligonier by the REA truck.

Carl Tantlinger, an employee of the LVRR from 1948 to 1952, confirmed that express shipments to Ligonier from the Latrobe depot were delivered by truck. He also recalled that Wilbert's REA office was located at the east end of LVRR's freight building.

As a footnote, most Friends will remember that Wilbert Gindlesperger wrote the words of "The Doodlebug," which is sung to the tune of the "Wabash Cannonball."