

# The Liggie

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

September 2012

Volume 8 - Issue 3

## LVRR'S ENGINE HOUSE TAKES ON A NEW LIFE

Most people in Ligonier Valley know the history of the building on West Main Street which has housed the Ligonier Valley School District Central Administration Office since September 2002 and before that served as the Pennsylvania Game Commission Southwest Division Headquarters from April 1957 to September 2002. Most residents of the valley also know that the building was originally built by the Ligonier Valley Rail Road (LVRR) in 1911 and served as its Ligonier Station and headquarters until 1952.

What many people may not remember or may never have known is the history of the building across the street from the station, which was bought by Holy Trinity Catholic Church in 1955 from the LVRR.



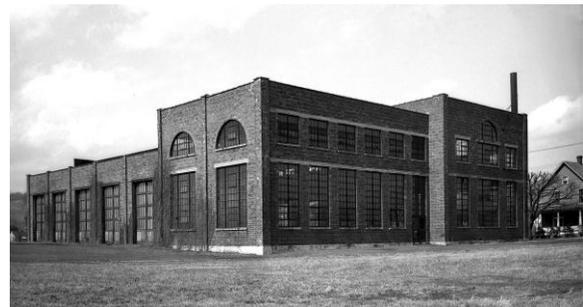
*This photograph taken before 1952 shows the LVRR engine house on the north side of Main Street while still in use.*

Around 1887, having outgrown its original small machine shop and two-bay engine house built near the Ligonier Station, the LVRR began construction of a new facility in 1920 on railroad property on the north side of Main

Street. The new engine house included five bays and a two-story machine shop which housed lathes, milling machines and furnaces, used in maintaining LVRR's railroad equipment.

After the LVRR ceased operations in 1952, its buildings and property were sold off piecemeal. Most of the property between Hadley and Walnut streets on the south side of Main Street, where both the Ligonier Station and the freight depot stood, was sold to the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

About the same time, Holy Trinity Catholic Church bought the engine house across Main Street from the LVRR and the six acres around it. The church's intent was to convert the existing building into a church and school large enough to accommodate Holy Trinity's increasing needs.



*The three distinct sections of the LVRR engine house are visible in this photograph, taken after the tracks were removed in 1952.*

The photograph above of the building as it stood in 1952 when it was still owned by the LVRR clearly shows the possibility of renovating the expansive building into a multi-purpose facility.

This factor coupled with the acreage that surrounded the property, which offered ample room for parking and future expansion, led to Holy Trinity's decision to purchase the property.

The original LVRR structure was divided into three sections. The one on the left in the photograph below, consisting of the five bays where railroad equipment was serviced, was partially demolished by Holy Trinity. The front and side walls of this section were removed, leaving the iron superstructure, the roof and the back wall to use in the new construction. The three bays closest to Walnut Street were converted into a two-story school and the remaining two into a multi-purpose room that continues to serve as Holy Trinity Parish's cafeteria, gymnasium and church social hall.



*Two walls of the bay section of the engine house were removed at the beginning of the renovation project.*

The taller section to the right in the picture above originally was the LVRR machine shop. This section was kept intact and converted into a space for worship. The original windows were filled in with cement blocks and new windows were installed. The interior then was totally renovated into a modern church.

Holy Trinity renovated the third section of the building by also blocking in the windows and installing new ones on

both the first and second floors. It converted the first floor into school administrative offices and an entranceway leading into the church. No additional changes were made on the second floor, which still functions as storage room for the parish, much as it did for the LVRR.



*Holy Trinity Catholic Church as it appeared in the late 1950s after the renovation project was complete*

Once the entire building was renovated and the exterior re-bricked in 1958, the transformation from engine house to church complex was complete. The contrast between the pictures of the building Holy Trinity Catholic Church purchased from the LVRR in 1955 and the building as it stood after the original renovation shows the great vision the church had in taking on such an ambitious project.

In 2005, a new Holy Trinity Catholic Church was constructed in front of the former engine house, which was then renovated a second time to accommodate the continuing needs of the parish.



*Today's Holy Trinity Catholic Church overshadows the former engine house.*

## HOLY TRINITY PARISH UNCOVERS EVIDENCE OF ITS BUILDING'S PAST

When construction workers recently made an interesting discovery while remodeling the social hall at Holy Trinity Catholic Church, Annie Williams, business manager of Holy Trinity Parish, invited representatives of the LVRRRA to share in the discovery.

While removing the old flooring in the social hall, workers uncovered the railroad tracks that were imbedded in the original concrete of LVRR's engine house. Not only were the rails still intact, but also the outline of the pit used by LVRR mechanics to work on the underside of the engines.

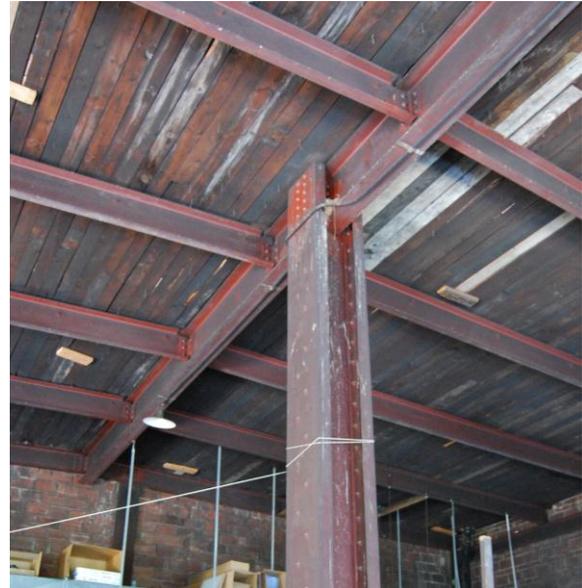


*The railroad tracks and the outline of the pit used by LVRR mechanics to work underneath engines were visible after workers recently removed the flooring in Holy Trinity's social hall.*

Upon viewing the outline of the pit, Bill McCullough recalled hearing years ago that when the church bought the property, anything left behind by the LVRR was shoveled into the pit to fill the hole. Unfortunately, no one will ever know what LVRR artifacts may lie buried beneath the concrete floor.

Williams also invited the LVRRRA personnel to tour the second floor above the Catholic school's administration offices. Although the parish uses the space for storage, the second floor, including the floor, walls, and ceiling, remains virtually the same as it was

when the LVRR built the engine house in 1922. The gigantic steel beams are still visible and the walls reveal the outline of the original domed windows now filled in with concrete blocks.



*Ninety years after LVRR's engine house was erected in 1922, the roof framework and I-beam pictured above remain functional.*



*The openings of the domed windows were filled in with concrete blocks when Holy Trinity renovated the engine house.*

Some remnants left behind by the LVRR have never been removed. Lighting fixtures, a workbench supporting a large vise and two banks of shelving remain as well as a can of grease and boxes of parts. Williams agreed to try to arrange a future joint project between the church and the LVRRRA to inventory the articles remaining in the bins. Hopefully, the project will result in uncovering additional information and artifacts relating to the LVRR.

## SEVENTH ANNUAL DINNER CONVENES AT THE BARN AT LIGONIER

On May 26, 72 Friends of the LVRR assembled at The Barn at Ligonier for its seventh annual dinner and meeting. The Pittsburgh Banjo Club entertained the guests during the cocktail hour while a continuous loop slide show provided an update of the caboose restoration project for interested attendees.



*Members of the Pittsburgh Banjo Club entertain guests at the annual dinner.*

After welcoming guests, Paul Fry, dinner chairman, reviewed the accomplishments of the LVRR over the past year. Fry also recognized the volunteers, staff and board directors for their time and effort in promoting the LVRR museum and the legacy of the LVRR.

Dave Byers, the evening's keynote speaker, chose as his topic "Why the



LVRR Could Not Exist Today." Byers, a son and grandson of former LVRR

employees and a director on the LVRR board, used various photographs to illustrate why having large railroad equipment in Ligonier today would be a safety hazard.



*Friends socializing during the cocktail hour*

One such photograph pictured a doodlebug crossing Main Street near today's First Wok Chinese Restaurant. Byers emphasized that even a doodlebug crossing the main street leading into Ligonier today would inconvenience traffic. Moreover, an engine pulling 40 cars of coal across Main Street would be unacceptable not only because of the major inconvenience but also the safety hazard it would present.

Representing the committee researching the 1912 train accident, Bob Stutzman updated Friends on the progress so far. Although the committee has gathered a considerable number of facts, more information will be needed in order to prepare a comprehensive report. The committee expects to complete its research and publish its findings before the end of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the accident.

Tom Donchez and Bill McCullough wound up the evening with a drawing for baskets donated by Ligonier merchants. The LVRR gratefully acknowledges the following businesses that donated goods and services:

- Abigail's Coffeehouse – Allegory Gallery
- Carol & Dave's Roadhouse – Celtic Culture
- The Finishing Touch – Flavors Cafe
- G Squared Gallery – John Klinchock Golf Pro
- Ligonier Country Club
- The Wicked Googly & The Ligonier Lanes
- Ligonier Tavern – Post & Rail Men's Shop
- The Road Toad – Second Chapter Books

## LVRRA PARTICIPATES IN SUMMER IN LIGONIER CRAFT SHOW

Once again the Friends of the LVRR set up its information booth at the Summer in Ligonier craft show on July 20 and 21 and enjoyed meeting old acquaintances as well as making new ones.

Setting up the booth during this event as well as during Fort Ligonier Days has resulted in spreading the word about the LVRR Museum and increasing the membership in its Friends organization. The experience has also proved valuable in that visitors to the booth often share information with the volunteers about the LVRR or railroading in general that previously was unknown to the LVRRA.



*Fresh from a visit to Fort Ligonier, Ethan Jablonski, age 10, and his brother Colin, age 7, of Buffalo ring the bell from Engine #19 in front of Ligonier Town Hall.*

As usual, LVRR's Engine #19 bell, which traditionally is displayed at the booth, attracted visitors both old and young who enjoyed ringing it and pretending to be an engineer.

### 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](mailto:lvrra@verizon.net).

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

## ROCK GARDEN WELCOMES VISITORS TO THE MUSEUM

The stone wall in front of the Darlington Station was created in 1877 when the LVRR cut its roadbed into the hillside. After the LVRRA accepted ownership of the property, the area was overgrown with trees, bushes and weeds creating an unkempt appearance. Now this area is a beautiful perennial garden which welcomes visitors to the museum.



*The perennial garden on the hillside in front of the museum*

This rock garden has received so many compliments that several Friends have suggested that the garden be expanded along the entire wall. Gladys and Phil Light, master gardeners, who initiated and designed the original garden, are willing to take on the expansion project, but only if additional volunteers are available to plant, weed and water the garden.

The proposed expansion would create a garden about four times as large as the existing one, greatly enhancing the entrance to the museum, but also increasing the number of man-hours required to maintain it. Friends who would like to see this project move forward should call Gladys or Phil at 724-238-4096 and volunteer their time.

## JUNE 30 FIELD TRIP RETRACES MILL CREEK BRANCH

Over the past years, LVRRA has annually rotated four different field trips, retracing various aspects of the industrial heritage of Ligonier Valley. The 2012 field trip tracing the Mill Creek Branch was scheduled this year to include the site of the 1912 train wreck and coincide with the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the accident.



Photo by Steph Anderson of the *Tribune-Review*  
*Louise Ashbaugh, niece of the 24<sup>th</sup> victim,*  
*and daughter Kathleen at the site of the 1912 accident*

The field trip included 33 Friends traveling in a nine-car caravan. Beginning at the former Ligonier Station, the tour followed the right-of-way from the coke ovens at Fort Palmer and at Wilpen to the concrete supports that held the Atlantic gasoline storage tanks in Ligonier. The most anticipated stop on the tour was the site of the 1912 accident. Fortunately, four participants were able to enhance the planned tour because of their backgrounds and personal experiences.

Louise Ashbaugh, a niece of the 24<sup>th</sup> victim of the accident, shared details of her aunt's suffering after the accident, and Harry Marker, the son of one of the first responders to the scene of the accident, added that the sights at the accident scene made his father physically ill. Ted Labuda, a life-long

resident and historian of Wilpen, and Ed Concus, a former employee of the Wilpen coking operation, recalled the presence of a water tower in the Wilpen yard in the 1940s. Since the lack of sufficient water to supply the steam engines in Wilpen was the root cause of the 1912 accident, probably the installation of the water tower in Wilpen was a corrective action taken by the railroad.

Friends attending the luncheon at Carol and Dave's Roadhouse after the tour agreed that LVRRA's field trips have been quite beneficial in disseminating information about the local history of railroading and the industries serviced by the railroads.

## CAROL AND DAVE'S ROADHOUSE CONTINUES TO PROMOTE THE LVRR MUSEUM

By partnering with Carol and Dave's Roadhouse, the LVRRA has spawned additional awareness of its railroad museum. Patrons of the Roadhouse can be seated in its railroad room, which features several collages of photographs of the LVRR.

In addition, Carol and Dave's Roadhouse, which advertises in the quarterly publication Laurel Mountain Post, is responsible for an LVRR Museum advertisement that appears in the Fall edition of the magazine. The Laurel Mountain Post offers free advertising to non-profit organizations referred by businesses which purchase advertising space. Thanks to Carol and Dave's Roadhouse for its continuing support of the LVRRA.

**NEW MEMBERS  
SINCE June 1, 2012**

John and Mary Hargnett  
Carol Mitchell  
Wylie and Marilyn Overly  
Kelly Steffy

**CABOOSE RESTORATION  
PROJECT CONTINUES**

The exterior caboose restoration hopefully will be completed by October at the LVRR Museum. The roof and the wall facing Idlewild Park have been replaced. Additionally, the four sides have a fresh coat of red paint. The iron steps, railings and grab bars have been sandblasted and are currently being dry-fitted prior to powder-coating. The decks at both ends of the caboose have been removed to facilitate the re-installation of the steps and will be replaced later with new ones. The target completion date for this phase of restoration is mid-fall so that visitors to the museum will again be allowed to access the caboose.

**THANK YOU REGINA,  
SUMMER INTERN**



Regina Brinza, a graduate student at Duquesne University, has completed her summer internship with the LVRR Museum. Her senior undergraduate thesis at St. Vincent College, "Adapting Railroad Stations for Reuse," led her to the restored Darlington Station where she interviewed museum staff for her project. Upon Brinza's graduation from St. Vincent, the LVRR museum granted her an internship to assist the museum staff in generating an accurate account of the 1912 accident. Thank you Regina!

**Friend forever – in memorial**

**Gene Melago**

**VOLUNTEERS REMOVE BLOCKAGE  
IN PARKING LOT DRAIN**

On May 29, when Paul Fry, museum-grounds committee chair, was notified that the drain basin in the parking lot was overflowing, he never could have guessed the source of the problem. After the Darlington fire truck pumped the water out of the basin, Fry and the men helping him found three snapping turtles that had been washed out of Idlewild's lakes into the basin.

One turtle escaped by crawling back under the fence and into the pond. A second turtle that had drowned was removed, but a third was lodged several feet into the 12" drain pipe, preventing its removal.

Almost two weeks later, Fry solved the blockage problem by enlisting the aid of Bob Ramsey of Ramsey Excavating and Bob McDowell, chief of the Darlington Volunteer Fire Department, to help remove the remaining turtle. By pumping water under pressure through a three-inch hose at 150 pounds per square inch, the men dislodged the turtle along with other debris.



*Darlington Fire Department comes to the rescue.*

The LVRRRA is indebted to Ramsey, McDowell and Fry for volunteering their time and equipment to open the drain.

## 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

## VOLUNTEERS EXTRAORDINAIRE!

Sharing their time and talent, the following volunteers have assisted the LVRRA in recent months by taking photographs, staffing the Summer in Ligonier booth, weeding the rock garden, restoring the caboose, researching information, etc. Kudos to:

Huck Barras - Dave Byers - Kerry Byers  
Ruth Campbell - Tom Donchez - Paul Fry  
Peggy Gideon - CR & Linda Greene  
Carol & Ed Gross - Rita and Jack Horrell  
Tom Hunter - Gladys and Phil Light  
Bill McCullough - Art McMullen - Mimi Owens  
Bob & Ellen Piper - Toni Polosky  
Bill Potthoff - Carol and Dick Sheats  
Pat Slack - Bruce Shirey - Bob & Ina Smithley  
Carolyn and Bob Stutzman - Sally Walker

## 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  
Past Directors: Lisa Hays — Janet Hudson  
Al Pilz — Ralph Scalise — Bill Stablein

## RECENT CONTRIBUTIONS

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

**John Bohla** — Photograph of father, Frank Bohla, a survivor of the 1912 train accident

**Colleen Cardy** — PRR lantern with red Fresnel lens, manufactured by Dressel

**Thomas Giesey** — LVRRA passenger ticket from Ligonier to Latrobe, dated 1952

**Lynn Hale** (granddaughter of Matthew Nieport, a victim of the 1912 accident) — Numerous family mementos, including Nieport's derby and marriage certificate

**Holy Trinity Parish** — Photograph of the church after the 1958 renovation

**William Kennedy** — Civil Defense armband worn by railroad employees and a 1913 pamphlet detailing the negotiations between the Eastern Railroads and the Order of Conductors and the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen

**Jack Kinsey** — PRR freight hand truck

**Rev. Albert Kovacs** — The Railroad Book by Anne Feldman

**Elizabeth Miller** — LVRRA railroad passes issued to Vivian Snyder, grandfather of Miller and station master of the Darlington Station during the 1940s

**Robert Piper** — Photograph of Piper's uncle, Denny Piper, synchronizing his watch with engineer Fred Iscrupe prior to the Last Run of the LVRRA

**Michael Stovall** — Trunk with a 1903 Railway Express Agency shipping label directed to a Ligonier address

**John Vucina** — Digitized copy of a section of a 1895 Pennsylvania railroad map depicting the LVRRA railroad