



# THE LIGGIE

A Publication of the Ligonier Valley Rail Road Association for Friends of The Ligonier Valley Rail Road

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February 2021

## LVRRA Mill Creek Branch Winter Driving Tour

Taking advantage of open views through bare trees, in December 2020, Ligonier Valley Rail Road Association (LVRRA) co-founder **Bob Stutzman** led a trio of board members – **Tom Hunter, Doug Kurtz** and **Jennifer Sopko** – on a socially-distanced tour of the remnants of the Mill Creek Branch of the Ligonier Valley Rail Road (LVRRA). This nearly six-mile branch split from the main line in Ligonier and accessed the rich coal seam north of town and the resulting coal and coke operations along the route.

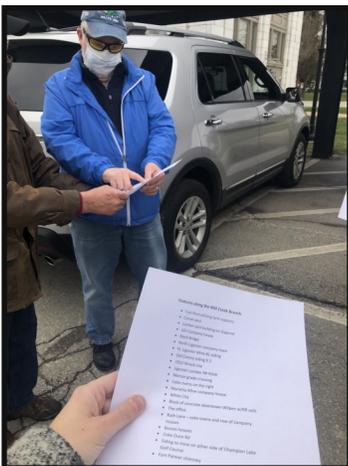
The small caravan of cars left the Ligonier station on West Main Street and followed Bob through Ligonier Borough, then chased the West Penn Power electric lines north (the lines generally follow the old railbed) to the former location of the coal mines, coke ovens, and the patch towns that developed around them in the Wilpen, Fort Palmer, Old Colony and Marietta communities of Ligonier Township.



A line of “push-through” coke ovens along the aptly-named Coke Oven Road in Wilpen.

We must emphasize that these surviving vestiges of the LVRRA Mill Creek Branch are located on private property and can be easily and safely seen from the public right-of-way. We encourage any history seekers to appreciate them from afar.

One highlight of the tour was a close-up view of the “push-through” coke covers along the appropriately named Coke Oven Road. These differ from the double row of traditional beehive coke ovens along Ruth Lane and far across a field near the Menzie Farm. Not far from the Coke Oven Road ovens is the last bastion of the Fort Palmer settlement – a solitary chimney.



Bob Stutzman points out his planned stops on the tour.

With Bob’s help, the LVRRA board members were able to make out the right-of-way for several sidings leading from the Mill Creek line, including one that accessed the Ligonier Lumber Company saw mill. The group also saw several former company and boss houses.

The horrific July 5, 1912 collision between a freight train and a passenger train at Denny’s Flats near Wilpen that killed 23 passengers and crew occurred on the Mill Creek line. The wreck site is located on Ligonier Camp and Conference property and not accessible to the public, although you can see the blind curve from the northern end of the Ligonier Valley Trail along Route 711. Look slightly northwest across the field from the trail marker detailing the history of the tragedy.



A chimney marks the location of the Fort Palmer settlement.

Our winter driving tour harkened back to the association’s past field trips to the Mill Creek Branch about a decade ago where participants communicated using CB radios. We wished our cell phones were as reliable as those radios the further we drove away from town!

# “Snow Trains” on the LVRR

In addition to the Ligonier Valley Rail Road (LVRR), one of the most important historical attractions of the Ligonier Valley is Laurel Mountain Ski Resort. Thankfully, Laurel Mountain remains open today for skiers to enjoy some of the purest skiing in the eastern United States. During Laurel Mountain's golden era (the 1940's through the 1960's) its reputation was such that it earned Ligonier the title of “The Ski Capital of Pennsylvania.” Lower Wildcat, the double black diamond slope that is the resort's most iconic run, remains the steepest slope in Pennsylvania.

Laurel Mountain opened for skiing on January 11, 1941. Thus its operations overlapped with those of the LVRR for more than 11 years (although Laurel Mountain was closed for World War II.)

The Pittsburgh Ski Club, founded in 1937 with its primary home resort as Seven Springs, quickly adopted Laurel Mountain as a go-to spot as well. It was primarily due to the club's impetus that the Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR) and the LVRR teamed up to offer what were known as “snow trains” less than one month after Laurel Mountain's initial opening. On its first run, the “snow train” left Pittsburgh at 8:05 a.m. on Sunday, February 9, 1941, and headed to Latrobe. There, the skiers with their gear transferred to the LVRR and arrived in Ligonier at 9:25 a.m. Buses transported the skiers from Ligonier to either Laurel Mountain or Seven Springs. That evening, the process reversed, and the surely exhausted skiers arrived back in Pittsburgh at 9:25 p.m.

The promotion was apparently a success as the PRR and LVRR ran several other “snow trains” for the remainder of the 1941 ski season. Laurel Mountain was open briefly during the 1941-42 season before closing for World War II. It reopened again for the winter of 1945-46. Undoubtedly, many skiers, from Pittsburgh and beyond, took advantage of rail service to Ligonier until the winter of 1951-52. One wonders how many times conductor Denny Piper helped properly stow skis on the passenger cars of the LVRR!

## LVRR Association Leadership Change

LVRR founder, board member and Treasurer, **Bill McCullough**, has taken a leave of absence from his duties as Treasurer. Effective immediately, board member and Secretary, **Doug Kurtz**, will also serve as Acting Treasurer. Board member and Association accountant, **Debbie Nicely**, will continue in her role and provide continuity during this transition. To our Friends - we appreciate your support and patience as Bill's duties are assumed by Doug. Please contact the Association at any time with your questions or concerns. Finally, to Bill McCullough – the Association can't thank you enough for everything you have done and will continue to do to help preserve the grand tradition of the Ligonier Valley Rail Road.

**SKIERS SPECIAL SERVICE**  
—TO—  
**LAUREL MOUNTAIN SLOPES**  
(LIGONIER, PA.)

**\$1.65**  
ROUND  
TRIP

—SPECIAL SKI TRAIN—  
**SUNDAY, MARCH 2**

Leaves Pittsburgh (Pa. Sta.) 8:00 A. M.  
" East Liberty - - 9:12 A. M.

**Buses connecting with train at Ligonier arrive at Ski Slopes—11:15 A.M.  
Returning—Buses Leave Ski Slopes at 5:00 P. M., for train connection**

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Tickets on sale at City Ticket Office and Penna. Station, Pittsburgh, East Liberty Station, Gimbel Bros. Travel Bureau, Joseph Horne Co., Kaufmann's Sporting Goods Dept., Mellon Bank Travel Bureau and Sears Roebuck Co. (all stores.)

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**PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD**

Although not specifically mentioned in this PRR advertisement, the LVRR was a critical leg of the skiers' journey from Pittsburgh to Laurel Mountain.  
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette - February 28, 1941.

# Remembering Janet Hudson (1954-2021)

The LVRRA Board of Directors is sad to learn of the recent death of **Janet Hudson**, former director of the Ligonier Valley Library and a founding board member of the Ligonier Valley Rail Road Association. Janet retired in 2020 after a 44-year career at the library and was also involved with several community boards and organizations, including the LVRRA. She served on the LVRRA board of directors in 2004 and 2005.

LVRRA co-founder Bob Stutzman fondly remembers Janet's role in the eventual creation of the association:

"Janet Hudson, a founding director of the Ligonier Valley Rail Road Association, was arguably the inspiration for its existence. Yes, Bill McCullough and I are listed as the co-incorporators, but Janet "found us" before its incorporation. We were just two guys who enjoyed collecting photographs pertaining to the Ligonier Valley Rail Road and talking to former employees. Janet had asked us to help identify photographs in the Ligonier Valley Library's first Historic Photography Show to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Last Run of the LVRR. Additionally, she asked us to make a presentation of our photos to the public at the library. On a cold November evening in 2002, the library had seating for some 75 guests. The library did not get an accurate count because they quit counting at 200. Bill and I presented two shows that evening to accommodate all the guests. Janet and her Pennsylvania Room staff had uncovered a very interesting topic to inaugurate their historic photograph exhibits. Always an enabler, Janet also arranged for the library to host the book-signing event to launch my "Ligonier Valley Rail Road" book marketed by Arcadia Publishing. Thank you Janet!" - *Bob Stutzman*



## Commemorative Brick Walkway Update



As a thank you for their generous help and support, the LVRRA Board of Directors purchased three commemorative bricks for the memorial walkway at the Ligonier Valley Rail Road Museum. The board wanted to recognize long-time member and volunteer **Gladys Light** for her time and dedication to caring for the museum's flower beds. **Carpenter Technology Corporation** and **Ligonier Construction** are also featured on bricks to thank these companies for their help in transporting and storing the vintage kiddie Doodlebug ride the association acquired last year.

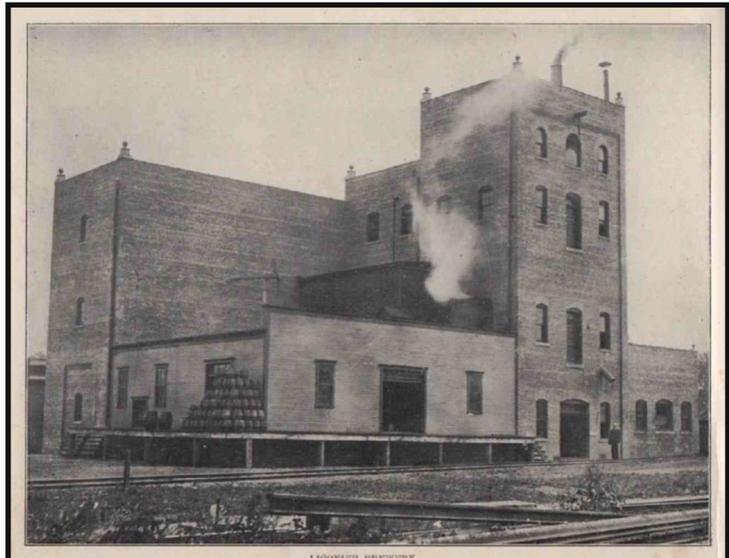
We also want to recognize other recent donors who purchased memorial bricks: **Jim Murdock, Larry and Char Burch, and Barbara and Peter Usher.**

Since 2017, more than a hundred engraved bricks have been purchased for the walkway and plenty are still available to buy and personalize in honor or memory of loved ones. The proceeds generated through the sale of these bricks are added to a capital fund used to maintain and update the museum, located in the restored Darlington train station. In preserving the station, future generations will be reminded of how the Ligonier Valley Rail Road influenced the development of Ligonier and the surrounding valley. The price per brick is \$50.00. Please call 724-238-7819 with your brick request or download an order form from the LVRRA website here: <https://www.lvrra.org/pdf/Brickorderform.pdf>.

# Industry Along the LVRR: Ligonier Brewing Co.

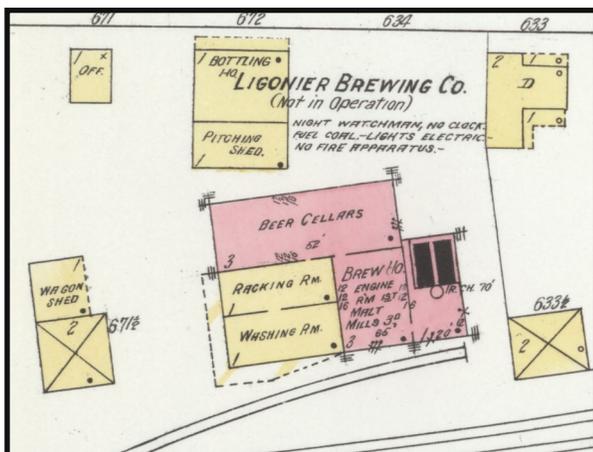
The Ligonier Valley Rail Road (LVRR) served many industries along its path. The most well-known are the coal and coke operations and the blue stone quarries. However there were others. Interestingly, the industrial spur closest to the LVRR Ligonier station (not associated with the LVRR itself) was built to service a brewery. (A spur serving the South Ligonier Coal Company was nearly as close and in the same vicinity).

Distilling and brewing operations began in Ligonier in early 1907 when the Boquet Distillery was erected on the south side of West Main Street. Later that year, construction of the Ligonier Brewery began. The construction order for the brewing complex included 400,000 bricks to be purchased from the Latrobe Brick Company. The investors and owners of the brewery specifically mentioned the extensive coal developments in the Ligonier region as justification for their belief that there would be a strong market for locally-produced beer to a growing working class population.



The Ligonier Brewery, pictured in the 1908 Ligonier Sesqui-Centennial And Old Home Week publication.

The brewery was completed in early 1908 and included an office building and a combination bottling and pitching shed building that both fronted Main Street. To the rear of the lot was the largest building, which included beer cellars, a racking room, a washing room, the brew house, and an engine plant to power the equipment. A smaller wagon shed building was built to the west of the larger building on the rear of the lot.



Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Ligonier, PA. Sanborn Map Company - August, 1910. Source: Library of Congress.

It was at the rear of the lot that a LVRR spur was built to service the brewery. Presumably the LVRR delivered the raw materials required in the brewing process and then shipped out the finished barrels of beer. Of note, in 1908, Ligonier Borough already had potable water service for its homes and businesses.

Notwithstanding the optimism of the original investors in the Ligonier Brewery, it did not last long. The 1910 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Ligonier noted that the brewery was "not in operation." In November of 1910, however, a new company, the Idlewild Brewing Company incorporated and would use the former Ligonier Brewing property. (This new venture was not affiliated with the LVRR's nearby picnic park.) But the Idlewild Brewing Company was just as short-lived as the Ligonier Brewery. In June of 1912, the Idlewild Brewing Company assets in Ligonier were put up for tax sale.

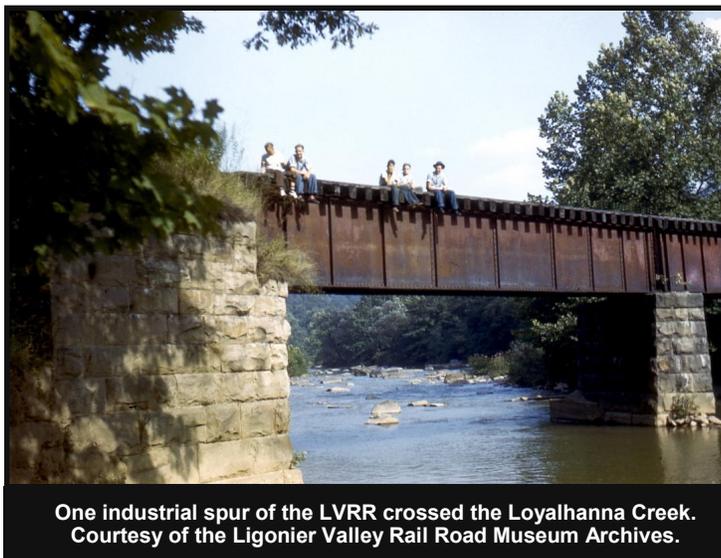
The structure then remained mostly vacant until the Pennsylvania Highway Department rented a portion of it in the late 1920's to store equipment. By this point an automotive service and filling station, the Ligonier Valley Service Station, had been erected on the property just to the west of the old brewery. In 1946, Gulf Refining Company purchased both the service station and closed brewery properties. Gulf updated and operated the service station on the combined properties, but the largest building of the old brewery remained standing for storage and rental purposes. This building can be clearly seen in the video of the last run of the LVRR on August 31, 1952. The Ligonier Brewery building was finally torn down in the spring of 1957.

# Ligonier Brewing Co. (continued from Page 4)

In 1958, Gulf Oil Corporation and the Westmoreland Farm Bureau traded properties, with Gulf taking ownership of the former feed store located on South Market Street. Gulf built a modern service station in a colonial-style building. This has remained a gas station ever since and is currently the Ligonier GetGo. The Westmoreland Farm Bureau took ownership of the old Ligonier Brewery and Ligonier Valley Service Station property on West Main Street. The Bureau constructed on the site the Westmoreland Farm Co-op Feed Store. In 1965, The Westmoreland Farm Bureau consolidated its operations with Agway. The store on West Main Street has been known as Agway ever since. Behind Agway is the current location of the Ligonier American Legion. It is between these two buildings that the LVRR spur to the Ligonier Brewery existed many years ago.

## Train Trivia

In our last issue we asked our readers, “**Did the LVRR ever cross the Loyalhanna Creek?**” This is a bit of a trick question! The mainline of the LVRR (the main tracks connecting Latrobe and Ligonier) never crossed the Loyalhanna Creek. For a large portion of its length, the mainline hugged the north side of the Loyalhanna but never crossed it. But



there was a perception that the railroad’s mainline crossed the Loyalhanna Creek near Longbridge (the Lincoln Highway/Route 30 bridge that spanned both the Loyalhanna and the LVRR.) But the mainline of the LVRR stayed to the north of the Loyalhanna as it passed under Longbridge.

However, an industrial spur of the LVRR did indeed cross the Loyalhanna Creek to the west of Longbridge. The spur left the mainline near the Booth and Flinn stone quarry tipple on the north side of the Loyalhanna. It then crossed the Loyalhanna and terminated near the current Longbridge Station, the Amish furniture store that also sells knives and bait and tackle. This spur serviced the Booth and Flinn quarry site on the south side of the Loyalhanna Creek.

The Booth and Flinn quarry site on the south side of the Loyalhanna has been out of operation for many decades. The Booth and Flinn quarry site on the north side of the Loyalhanna transitioned to become the blue stone quarry of the Latrobe Construction Company. The site remains active to this day as the Latrobe Asphalt plant of the Hanson corporation.

Two of the more significant bridges of the LVRR, one on the mainline and one on the Wilpen branch, did cross Mill Creek, a tributary of Loyalhanna Creek. The mainline of the LVRR crossed Mill Creek just as the railroad approached Ligonier from the west. The site of this crossing is at virtually the same place as the current Route 30 westbound bridge that crosses Mill Creek. The Wilpen branch of the LVRR crossed Mill Creek just as the branch was leaving Ligonier to the north. The site of this crossing is where the current Ligonier Valley Trail begins behind Weller Field and Ligonier Borough’s Friendship Park.

Finally, though the only crossing of the Loyalhanna by the LVRR was the quarry spur, the Pittsburg, Westmoreland, and Somerset Railroad (PWS) crossed the Loyalhanna Creek twice. The first crossing was near the site of the Byers and Allen lumber mill, which owned the PWS. This location is south of Route 30 just to the east of Ligonier. The PWS crossed back over the Loyalhanna at Mellons Crossing, located closely to the west of Route 381, less than a mile from the Route 30/Route 381 intersection. The abutments for this crossing are clearly visible from Route 381.

**This issue’s question: “How many stations of the LVRR are still standing?”** For the answer to this question, please be sure to read our next issue!

# Thank You Friends!

With the start of new year, many of the Friends of the LVRRA are renewing their financial support for the Association. To all our current and potential new Friends – thank you! Your membership donations are vital to the maintenance of the Darlington Station museum and the overall preservation of the history of the Ligonier Valley Rail Road. This includes new acquisitions like our very own Doodlebug ride that we hope to have up and running as soon as safely possible. If you haven't visited our museum recently, please consider doing so again now. We would love to show you your generosity at work. Thanks again, Friends of the LVRRA!

# LVRRA Seeks Volunteers

The LVRRA continues to seek volunteers to serve as docents at the Ligonier Valley Rail Road Museum. Docents give educational tours and handle gift shop sales during the museum's operating hours. If you are interested in railroad operations and history or Ligonier Valley history, this is a great way to serve your community. No prior experience is required. Training will be provided. Anyone interested in becoming a museum docent, please contact the LVRRA by email at [info@lvrra.org](mailto:info@lvrra.org).



# The LVRR Museum is Open

After closing for several weeks due to Pennsylvania's recent coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions during the holiday season, the Ligonier Valley Rail Road Museum reopened to the public on Saturday, January 9. We want to remind our members and visitors that the museum is open for guided tours and gift shop purchases during our normal operating hours on Saturdays from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. All visitors and docents must follow COVID-19 protocols by wearing masks and social distancing while inside the museum and caboose. The museum is also open by appointment for individual or group tours outside of our normal operating hours. Please contact us by email at [info@lvrra.org](mailto:info@lvrra.org) to schedule a visit.

## Ligonier Valley Rail Road Museum

**At the Restored Darlington Station**  
3032 Idlewild Hill Road  
P.O. Box 21  
Ligonier, PA 15658

**Hours of Operation**  
Saturdays Year-Round  
11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

**Contact Information**  
Phone: 724-238-7819  
Email: [info@lvrra.org](mailto:info@lvrra.org)  
Web: [www.lvrra.org](http://www.lvrra.org) and 

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## Mission of the LVRRRA

Established in 2004 as a 501c(3) nonprofit organization, the Ligonier Valley Rail Road Association's mission is to:

- Preserve the legacy of the LVRR
- Conserve vestiges of the LVRR
- Collect memorabilia of the LVRR
- Educate the public about the history of