



# THE LIGGIE

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

Volume 15 – No. 3  
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## LVRRA to Restore Vintage Kiddie Ride Honoring Historic Doodlebug

*Carpenter Technology Corp. Funded Cross-Country Transport*

The Ligonier Valley Rail Road Association (LVRRA) received a community grant and technical support from Carpenter Technology Corporation for the transport of a vintage kiddie trolley ride acquired by the association for its museum. Carpenter also handled the shipment of the kiddie ride from Washington state to Ligonier Construction in Laughlintown. The trolley left the Pacific Northwest and arrived in Ligonier in September.

The LVRRA purchased the ride from Maltby Antiques & Collectibles in Maltby, Washington earlier this year and applied to the Carpenter Technology Cares community grant program for funding to cover the cross-country journey of the trolley, track, and other parts. The association plans to restore the kiddie ride as a static display at the Ligonier Valley Rail Road Museum with a long-term goal of operating it as a seasonal amusement ride for children, complementing the museum's popular 1905 Bobber Caboose. The Doodlebug can now be viewed at the museum during its regular operating hours of 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on Saturdays.

The museum's "new" trolley is almost identical to the Doodlebug kiddie attraction at the neighboring Idlewild and SoakZone amusement park, which was once owned and operated by the railroad. The "Doodlebug" name is believed to be inspired by the gasoline-powered, self-propelled passenger rail cars that operated on the Ligonier Valley Rail Road in its later years as a cheaper alternative to steam.



**It's a work in progress, but when restored, the Doodlebug kiddie ride will be an attractive addition to the LVRRA Museum.**



**Johnny Klipa, 5, of Plum, was the first official Doodlebug "rider."**

"The LVRRA would not succeed without donations, endless volunteers and corporate sponsors who continue to support the Ligonier Valley Rail Road Museum. Carpenter Technology and Ligonier Construction have made it possible to acquire the antique Doodlebug. The LVRRA hopes to restore and power the ride. Even though it won't be traveling between Ligonier and Latrobe, it will bring joy to the next generation of railroaders," said LVRRA board president David Byers.

The LVRRA thanks Carpenter for its generous support of this project, which continues a long history between the two organizations. Carpenter acquired locally-based Latrobe Specialty Metals Inc. in 2012. Prior to that, scrap metal was delivered to the old melt shop at the main plant for about 50 years via the Ligonier Valley Rail Road, whose line ran parallel to Lincoln Avenue and now serves as a walking trail. One of the last commercial uses of the former railroad track was Conrail's transport of the old Sack Press out of the steel plant in the late 1990s. LVRRA co-founders Bill McCullough and Bob Stutzman and board member Doug Kurtz all enjoyed 30-plus-year careers at Latrobe Steel.

# The Westmoreland Central Railroad

We published a story in the August 2020 issue of *The Liggie* that noted the three railroads that connected to the Ligonier Valley Rail Road (LVRR). These were the well-known Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR), the Pittsburg, Westmoreland, and Somerset Railroad (PWS), and the lesser-known Ligonier Lumber Company Railroad (LLC). However, this list is incomplete. There was yet another railroad that connected with the LVRR and it was of great historical significance to the operations of the Ligonier line. When the LVRR began operations in 1877, it was already widely known that coal mining operations could be developed along its right-of-way. In fact, some mining activity, particularly near Latrobe, predated the LVRR.

With LVRR trains running between Latrobe and Ligonier after 1877, several coal mines began operations in earnest. These ranged from the Loyalhanna Coal & Coke Company mine near Oakville in Latrobe to the South Ligonier Coal Company mine just west of Ligonier Borough. This range of LVRR mainline mining operations is represented by eight red lights on the interactive map at the Darlington Station museum.

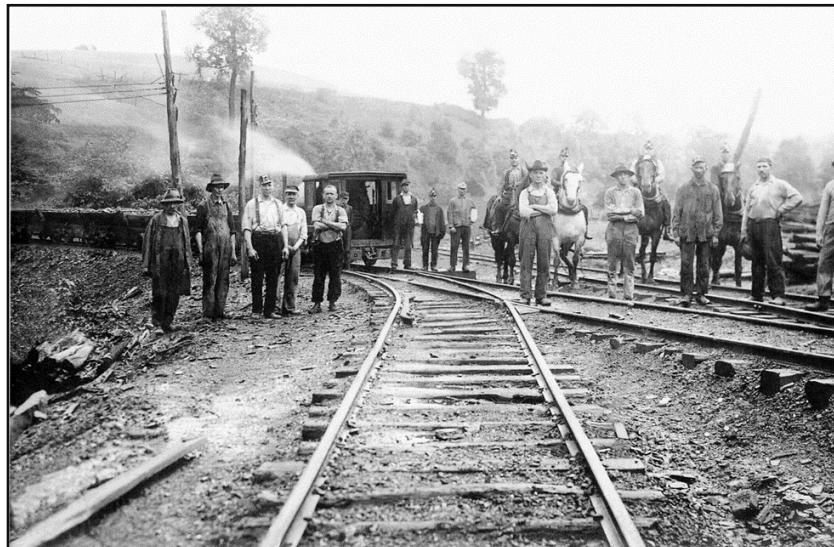
But beyond this, a more significant source of coal, part of the Pittsburgh Seam, was known to exist northeast of Ligonier, extending along and near Mill Creek and Hanna's Run for several miles. (The mines that evolved to take advantage of this seam are represented by twenty-two red lights on the museum's interactive map.) Knowledge of this seam also predated the beginning of the LVRR. But, consistent with its conservative business model, the LVRR chose not to extend its line northeast of Ligonier when it began initial operations.

However, by 1903, other parties became interested in establishing mining operations in this area, which virtually mandated the construction of a railroad to service the planned coal mines and coke ovens. First to take action were John and Samuel Seger, owners of the Seger Coal & Coke Company. Along with their initial mining operations about two miles from Ligonier, the brothers also established their own nascent railroad, the Westmoreland Central Railroad (WCR). The WCR would service the coal and coking operations north of Ligonier and its line was also planned to be extended to Bolivar and connect to the PRR. Such a railroad would have directly challenged the LVRR's monopoly on linking the Ligonier Valley area to the PRR.

The Seger brothers' interests began construction of their plant and railroad in 1903. This work included grading of the right-of-way (ROW) that the LVRR claimed as its own. With this perceived provocation, the LVRR filed suit against the WCR, alleging usurpation of the ROW and improper organization of the railroad. The LVRR claimed that the WCR was only formed to interfere with the LVRR operations and not for legitimate railroad purposes. An injunction was granted in favor of the LVRR, halting any further WCR work on the claimed LVRR ROW. However, the WCR continued work on the portion of the railroad from its mining operations, now called the Colonial Coal & Coke Company, to the LVRR ROW.

The Westmoreland Central received wide publicity at the time, especially with its stated goal of running from just north of Ligonier through the coal fields to the PRR to the north. In July 1904, the WCR announced that it was moving its planned northern terminus from Bolivar to New Florence due to the likely requirement for a tunnel to reach Bolivar.

Additionally, the WCR also had grandiose plans to extend southward throughout the length of the Ligonier Valley to Donegal and even on to Connellsville to connect to the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. Such wildly optimistic plans were often associated with proposed railroads of this era.



The Old Colony coal mining operations appear in the background of this undated photograph. The LVRR tracks seen here were likely originally laid as part of the Westmoreland Central Railroad. Image courtesy of the Ligonier Valley Library Pennsylvania Room, published in *Images of Rail: The Ligonier Valley Rail Road* by Robert Stutzman.

# The Westmoreland Central Railroad

(continued from Page 2)

In August 1904, the dispute between the LVRR and the WCR was settled with the LVRR essentially taking over the WCR operations north of Ligonier. The contested ROW became the main portion of the LVRR Mill Creek Branch of the LVRR, with the section leading to the WCR mining works known as the Old Colony spur.<sup>1</sup> A month later, the LVRR laid track to Mill Creek, where a plate girder bridge would be built. After the demise of the LVRR in 1952, this bridge, often called the "Black Bridge," proved an irresistible attraction to generations of Ligonier children, especially given its proximity to the playground. The railroad bridge was eventually removed in the 1980s.

Because its name was similar to a Pittsburgh-area company, the Colonial Coal & Coke Company was renamed the Old Colony Coal & Coke Company in 1905. The Greensburg–Connellsville Coal & Coke Company bought out the Old Colony operation operations in 1912, but the Old Colony name endured as the name of the area. Underground coal mining and coke oven operations ceased in Old Colony in 1925.

Over the course of four years, from 1904 to 1908, the LVRR extended its branch beyond Old Colony to Marietta, Wilpen, and Fort Palmer. The Mill Creek Branch of the LVRR, sometimes also called the Wilpen or Wilpen – Fort Palmer Branch, became a legendary part of the LVRR from 1908 to 1952, through both man-made tragedy and economic triumph. The branch's total 5.7-mile run extended from the LVRR's 10.5-mile mainline.

It appears the Westmoreland Central Railroad continued to exist, at least on paper, and therefore as a potential investment opportunity (or risk!). In 1905, it was reported the WCR was sold to "eastern capitalists."<sup>2</sup> Once again, the railroad's plans to build a line from the PRR at Bolivar (or New Florence) through Ligonier and Donegal to the B&O at Connellsville were revived.

The Old Colony name survives to this day, primarily in the form of the Old Colony Sportsmen's Club, which is accessed through a private road off Peoples Road in Ligonier Township. Additionally, some of the decaying coke ovens from the Old Colony operations are visible from Myers School Road. However, that road, and view of the coke ovens, is currently inaccessible due to surface mining and reclamation work in progress in this area.

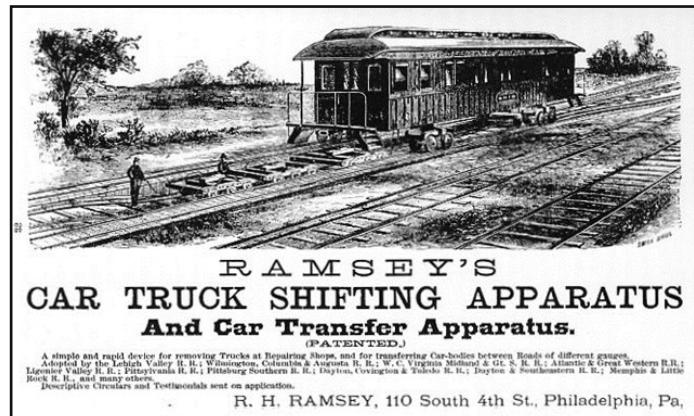
<sup>1</sup>The LVRR Mill Creek Branch comprised the present-day Ligonier Valley walking trail and stretched beyond to Wilpen.

<sup>2</sup>"Railroad reported sold." *Latrobe Bulletin*. Sept. 13, 1905.

Sources include *Images of Rail: The Ligonier Valley Rail Road* by Ligonier Valley Rail Road Association (LVRRA) co-founder Robert D. Stutzman, (Arcadia Publishing, 2014); and various contemporary newspaper stories, many of which are available on the LVRRA website.

## From the LVRR Archives

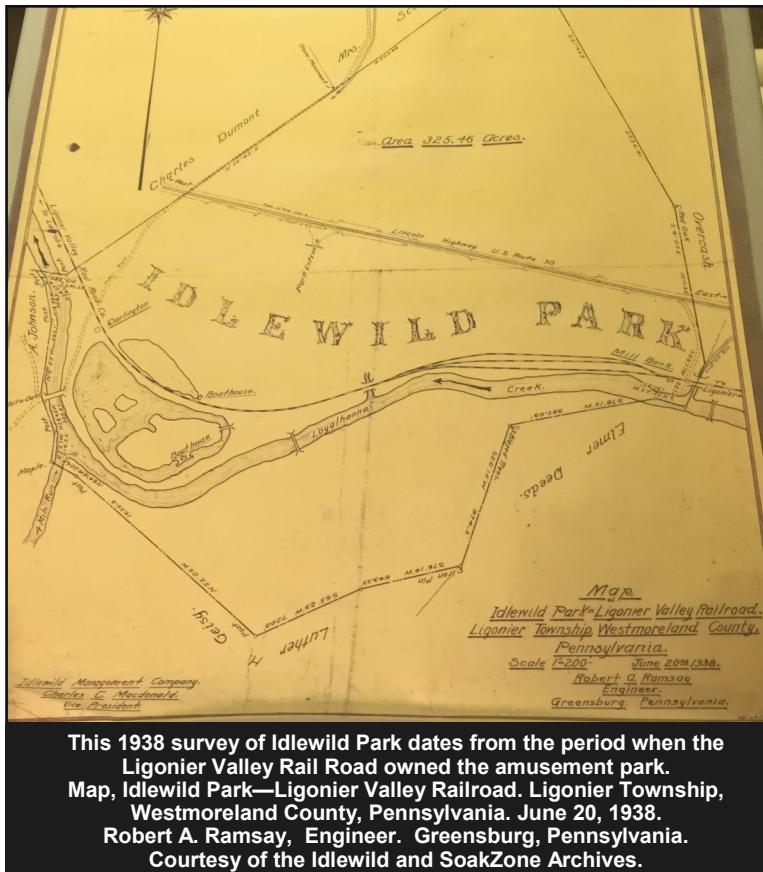
Due to Judge Thomas Mellon's business conservatism, the Ligonier Valley Rail Road (LVRR) began operations in 1877 as a narrow gauge railroad, 3-foot gauge in the case of the LVRR. Narrow gauge is less expensive to construct and operate. However, the disadvantage of narrow gauge is the inability to efficiently transfer freight to a standard gauge railroad. Since the primary purpose of the LVRR was to connect the Ligonier Valley to the standard gauge Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR), this certainly came into play with the LVRR. One method of improving the transfer efficiency was to use the Ramsey Car Truck Shifting Apparatus to change out the narrow gauge wheel truck assemblies with standard gauge wheel trucks, which allowed the transfer of the entire car with its freight load. The LVRR was the first railroad to put the recently invented Ramsey transfer mechanism into operation. Even this innovation was less than optimal. With booming passenger business and burgeoning freight business, the LVRR converted to standard gauge operation in 1882 and was therefore able to connect directly to the PRR.



## **LVRR-Idlewild Connection Lasted Nearly 75 Years**

The Ligonier Valley Rail Road (LVRR) — and by extension, the Mellon family — was involved in the development and operation of Idlewild Park for most of the company's 75-year life, from the park's inception on May 1, 1878 until a few years before the railroad disbanded for good.

The LVRR initially leased land along the railroad right-of-way in Ligonier Township from Mary Carson O'Hara Darlington and husband William McCullough Darlington for its scenic picnic grounds in 1878, over time adding picnic pavilions, dance and dining halls, artificial lakes with rowboats and launches, and a steam-powered merry-go-round.



The railroad company purchased the Idlewild Park property – roughly 325 acres – for \$50,000 from the Darlington family heirs on February 26, 1923.<sup>1</sup> The land had passed from Mary Darlington to her three children (O'Hara, Mary and Edith) and, at the time, belonged to the following heirs, according to the deed: Mary O'Hara Darlington; the Commonwealth Trust Company of Pittsburgh and Francis R. Harbison, as trustees for Samuel A. Ammon (Edith's husband); the Commonwealth Trust Company of Pittsburgh as guardian of Barbara Lane Darlington; the Fidelity Title and Trust Company of Pittsburgh as guardian of Lois Darlington Dowling; and Edith Darlington Ghysnels.

By the end of the decade, the LVRR had plans to develop Idlewild into a more traditional amusement park with electric rides, regular entertainment, games, concession stands and other attractions. It formed a subsidiary company, the simply-named Idlewild Company (IC), that leased the park to the Idlewild Management Company (IMC) – another subsidiary company that would manage the day-to-day operation of the park.

The IMC was a partnership between the stockholders of the IC (51%) and Clinton C. Macdonald (49%), an amusement park industry veteran that the Mellon family had employed to manage Motor Square Garden in Pittsburgh. While Mr. Macdonald, his wife Grace R. Macdonald, and sons Jack and Dick would shoulder much of the operational responsibility for the park, members of the Mellon family and LVRR employees either served on the IMC board or were stockholders. Richard King Mellon, Fred S. Mellon and LVRR superintendent Joseph P. Gochnour, Jr. were IMC board members. By 1943-1944, Mellon family stockholders in the IMC included Lucille Mellon Hasbrouck, the A.W. Mellon Educational & Charitable Trust, Sarah Mellon Scaife, Thomas Mellon, Richard King Mellon, the Estate of Richard Beatty Mellon, William Larimer Mellon, Mary Mellon McClung, William Larimer Mellon Jr., Edward Purcell Mellon, T.A. Mellon, and Edward Purcell Mellon II.<sup>2</sup>

*(Story continued on Page 5)*

# **Richard P. Mellon (1939-2020)**

The Ligonier Valley Rail Road Association sends its condolences to the family of Richard P. Mellon, who passed away on July 27, 2020 at age 81. Mr. Mellon was the son of General Richard King Mellon and Constance Prosser Mellon, the grandson of Richard Beatty Mellon and the great-grandson of Ligonier Valley Rail Road founder, Judge Thomas Mellon.

# LVRR-Idlewild Connection (continued from Page 4)

By the end of the 1940s, freight business had waned on the Ligonier line. Its bustling amusement park, which had reopened after being closed for a couple years due to World War II, was benefiting from automobile traffic. The signals were clear. The Ligonier Valley Rail Road sold Idlewild Park for \$62,000 to the Idlewild Management Company in 1949.<sup>3</sup>

The following year, both R.K. Mellon and Gochnour resigned from the IMC Board of Directors and the Macdonald family bought out the Mellons; the IMC board transferred 102 shares of the company to Jack and Dick Macdonald on June 19, 1950. Thus ended the Ligonier Valley Rail Road Company — and the Mellon family's — ownership and involvement in Idlewild Park. The LVRR itself closed after its final run on August 31, 1952.

<sup>1</sup>Deed, February 26, 1923, Recorded March 17, 1923, Westmoreland County Deed Book, Vol. 743, Pages 83–86.

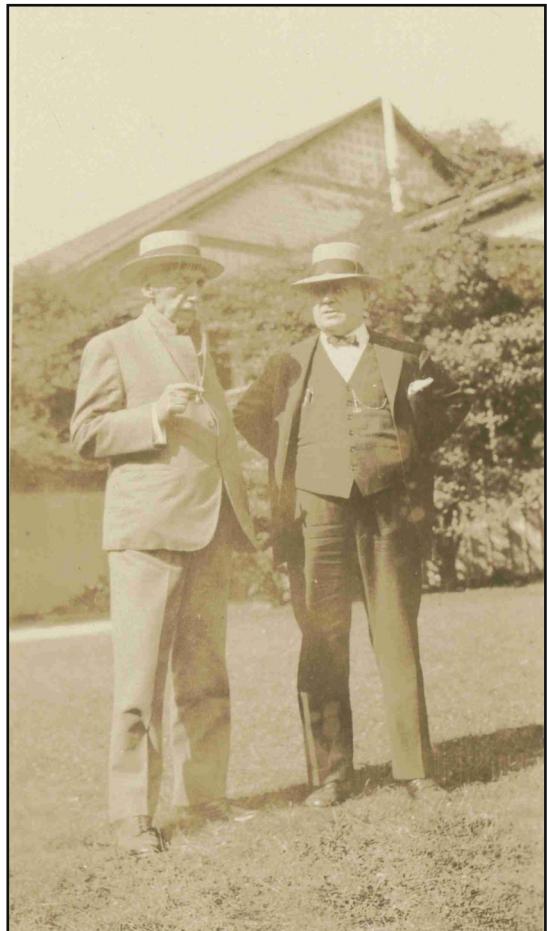
<sup>2</sup>IC Stockholders also included the Union Trust Company of Pittsburgh, Trustee, the Nollem Corporation and Mac & Company, presumably all Mellon-owned businesses.

<sup>3</sup>Deed, January 26, 1949, Recorded April 21, 1949, Westmoreland County Deed Book, Vol. 1338, Pages 226–27.

## Sources

Jennifer Sopko. *Idlewild: History and Memories of Pennsylvania's Oldest Amusement Park*. Charleston, S.C.: The History Press, 2018.

Idlewild Management Company Minute Books 1 and 2, containing minutes from IMC Board of Directors and IMC Stockholders meetings (1931-1968), Idlewild and SoakZone Archives.



James Ross Mellon (L) and Joseph Gochnour, Sr. (R) at Idlewild Park in 1928.

Mellon's son and grandson, William Larimer Mellon and William Larimer Mellon, Jr., were IMC stockholders.

Gochnour's son, Joseph Gochnour, Jr., became LVRR superintendent in 1926 and later joined the IMC Board of Directors.

Courtesy of the Ligonier Valley Historical Society.

## Railroad Reminiscences



In our last issue, we issued a call for our readers to share their memories of the Ligonier Valley Rail Road. In response, Rita Johnson Horrell, of Darlington, shared this reminiscence:

*I was ten years old when the LVRR closed so these are memories from a young child. I remember riding the train with my mother to Latrobe for dentist appointments or shopping. She didn't drive and Dad would be at work.*

*Our home was on the hill above Darlington Bridge so my sisters and I could walk to Idlewild Park along the tracks. In the late afternoon on big picnic days we would wait for the train to pull out, taking picnic-goers back home. Many of them would throw their unused ride tickets out the windows to us.*

*Another memory is waving to the people on what we called "The Doodlebug" as it passed our one-room school, McCance, near what is now the Road Toad restaurant.*

# LVRRA Seeks Volunteers, New Board Member

The LVRRA is currently accepting letters of interest for an open seat on its board of directors. The board meets on the second Wednesday every other month (January, March, May, July, September, and November). Directors serve three-year terms.

We're also seeking 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 serving on the board of directors or becoming a museum docent, please contact the LVRRA by email at [info@lvrra.org](mailto:info@lvrra.org). Thank you!

## Museum Open Saturdays & By Appointment

A reminder to our members and visitors that the Ligonier Valley Rail Road Museum remains open for 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.

However, if you can't make it on Saturdays, we are flexible! The museum is also open by appointment for individual or group tours and holiday shopping outside of normal operating hours. Please contact us by email at [info@lvrra.org](mailto:info@lvrra.org) if you are interested in scheduling a visit.

## Our Online Store is Open!

Did you know that the Ligonier Valley Rail Road Museum has an online gift shop? If you're looking for a unique railroad-themed holiday gift for the history buff or railroad enthusiast on your list and can't make it to our brick and mortar museum store, you can order from a selection of books, DVDs, baseball hats and an HO scale model of our Ligonier Valley Rail Road Bobber Caboose. Keep checking back as we add new merchandise to our inventory. Our secure online gift shop can be accessed at [www.lvrra.org/giftshopdisplay.php](http://www.lvrra.org/giftshopdisplay.php).

## Train Trivia

"Did the LVRR ever cross the Loyalhanna Creek?"

For the answer to this and other bridge-related topics, please be sure to read our next issue!

## 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 LVRRA

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 railroading in the Ligonier Valley