



## History of the Paoli Train Station



To help preserve and publicize the history of Paoli Station amid ongoing Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) improvements, and to meet the requirements of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) executed in 2016 under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, this booklet was prepared by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) in cooperation with:

- U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration (FTA)
- Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office (PHMC)
- Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA)
- National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak®)



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## Travel through Paoli before the Railroad (1690 to 1850)

Paoli Station today is a popular stop for local commuters traveling between 30th Street Station in Philadelphia and the Main Line suburbs on SEPTA's Paoli-Thorndale Line. It is also used by Amtrak® passengers traveling longer distances using the *Keystone Service*® between Harrisburg and New York City, and the *Pennsylvanian*® service between Pittsburgh and New York City. Paoli, however, was an important stopping point for travelers through the region well before the introduction of rail travel.

The earliest recorded east-west transportation route through the Paoli area was a Native American trail in use as early as 1690. It led from the Delaware River to the Conestoga River and continued west to the Susquehanna. After the arrival of William Penn and the colonization of Southeastern Pennsylvania, the trail route became a bridle path and was primarily used for transporting people and goods by horsepower.

That bridle path was transformed in 1791 when the Pennsylvania Legislature ordered construction of a formal turnpike between Philadelphia and Lancaster. The road was constructed by the Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike Road Company, a private entity that operated it as a toll road. The route, paved with crushed stone, was completed in 1795 and operated through the late 1830s. It was named the Lancaster Turnpike and followed the approximate alignment of the old bridle path. In Paoli and the surrounding area, the Lancaster Turnpike eventually became Lancaster Avenue, which runs to the south of the present-day Paoli Station.

### The Vision of the Main Line

While the Lancaster Turnpike was an improvement over the old bridle path, the road was crowded, winding, and difficult to travel. To further improve travel conditions in the region the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania passed legislation in 1826 to construct a canal system known as "The Main Line of Public Works." It was aimed at improving travel between Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and points west.

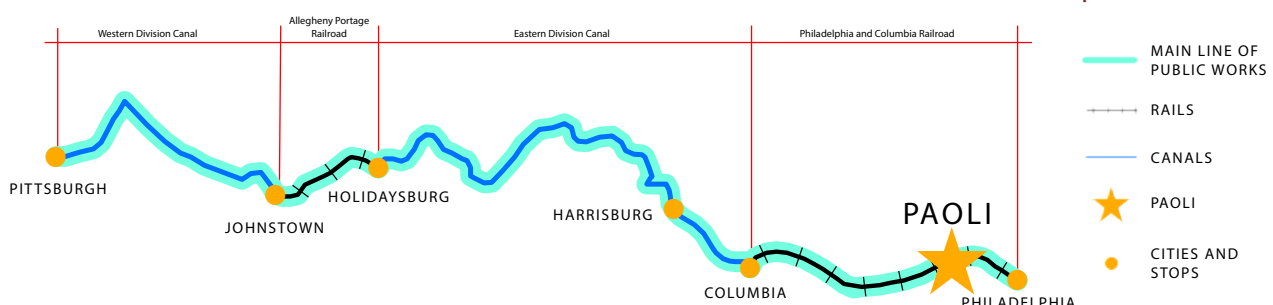
The Main Line of Public Works was originally envisioned as a cross-state canal route, designed for the speedy transportation of people and goods across the state. Travel by water would be much faster than was possible with wagons over land. However, by 1828, it was recognized that a cross-state canal route would be infeasible due to Pennsylvania's mountainous terrain. Fortunately, advances in railroad technology made during the planning and early construction stages of the canal system development made it faster and less expensive to build rail lines in areas where a canal would not be practical.

By 1834, two railway segments were constructed by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to complete the Main Line of Public Works. One segment crossed the Allegheny Mountains between Johnstown and Hollidaysburg and was known as the Allegheny Portage Railroad. The second segment extended from Philadelphia to Columbia and was known as the Philadelphia and Columbia Railroad (P&C). This system would ultimately establish the trackage which today serves Paoli Station.

In 1850, the eastern rail portion of the Main Line of Public Works was improved when the tracks of the P&C were combined with those of the West Philadelphia Railroad, a competing line that was incorporated in 1835 to provide service to and from Philadelphia while circumventing the Belmont Plane, a steep hill that the P&C was forced to traverse using a system of steam-powered cables. Acquiring the trackage of the West Philadelphia Railroad allowed the P&C to avoid the plane, saving time and effort when approaching and departing Philadelphia. This final alignment formed the eastern portion of the Main Line of Public Works and completed the canal-and-rail route across the state. The P&C established the alignment that is today a part of the Amtrak Philadelphia-Harrisburg Line, and is used by SEPTA trains on the Paoli-Thorndale Line. The present-day stretch of rail through Paoli originally established by the P&C, along with the surrounding suburban area, is still referred to as "the Main Line."

The completed Main Line of Public Works dramatically improved the speed of cross-state travel—a trip that previously would have taken 23 days by wagon could now be completed in just four-and-a-half days. While this was a substantial advancement, it was soon realized that an all-rail route could further improve the speed of travel and commerce across the state.

▼ **The Main Line of Public Works: A canal-and-rail route constructed between 1826 and 1834. Freight and passengers had to transfer between rail cars and canal boats three times to cross the state, and frozen canals hampered winter traffic.**





## Early Passenger Travel Experience at Paoli

Early travel through Paoli utilized local inns and taverns as stations for passengers to rest and eat prior to continuing their journey. According to local legend, Joshua Evans opened an inn to serve travelers between Philadelphia and points west. At the inn's opening on St. Patrick's Day in 1769, a toast was made to General Pasquale Paoli, a Corsican General and war hero. This toast inspired the innkeeper to name the establishment in his honor—the General Paoli Inn. With time, the settlement around the inn came to be known as Paoli.

The General Paoli Inn's location approximately 20 miles west of Philadelphia was prime real estate. When the Lancaster Turnpike was constructed through Paoli, it ran just south of the inn, which became a major stop for stage coaches. The General Paoli Inn continued to serve travelers through Paoli as the means of transportation through the area evolved.

As the railroads emerged in Pennsylvania with the development of the Main Line of Public Works, Joshua Evans Junior, a representative for Pennsylvania's 4th congressional district from 1829 to 1833 and second-generation innkeeper, is rumored to have used his influence to persuade the P&C to run its rail lines through Paoli. True or not, the railroad was built parallel to the Lancaster Turnpike near the General Paoli Inn. This resulted in the General Paoli Inn being patronized by rail workers and passengers, serving as a stopping point for food and fuel and functioning as the passenger station for Paoli.

Eventually, Evans Junior constructed a frame building on the grounds of the inn, closer to the rail line, to better serve as a passenger station for rail travelers. It would not be until 1883 that a station operated by the railroad company would be erected.

### **An All-Rail Route across Pennsylvania**

The Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR), nicknamed the "Pennsy," was chartered by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1846 to develop an all-rail passenger and freight route across the state. By 1851, it linked Philadelphia with Lancaster, Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, and beyond by leasing or purchasing several existing rail lines and constructing new connecting lines. Between Philadelphia and Lancaster, through Paoli, the PRR used the tracks that were established by the P&C as part of the Main Line of Public Works.

### **Early Passenger Rail – The Paoli Local**

While the rail route that serves Paoli Station was established to provide transportation across the state and beyond, the infrastructure provided an opportunity for local service between the Paoli area and Philadelphia. The service was slow to develop in the early days, but increased as demand for transportation to and from suburban areas rose as the area became more populated.

During the 1860s, when most of the Main Line was surrounded by rural farmland, the PRR ran six trains through Paoli each day. Only two of those were local trains running between Paoli and Philadelphia; the other four passed through Paoli without stopping. There was no service on Sundays. The trains were pulled by large steam locomotives equipped with cow-catchers. They were initially lit with candles and later, oil lamps.

With the PRR's establishment of local round-trip service between Philadelphia and Paoli in 1864, Paoli became a frequently used stop on the line. These commuter trains became known as the "Paoli Local," and operated much like today's Paoli-Thorndale Line served by SEPTA. City residents enjoyed spending time in Paoli's countryside, and in 1868 the Pennsy began to promote picnic excursions on the line to help popularize the route. Traffic increased over time, and by 1875 as many as 62 passenger trains ran between West Philadelphia Station and Paoli each day.



image courtesy of the Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society

► The General Paoli Inn, 1888. The local landmark served as Paoli's railroad station from the 1850s until the 1883 passenger station was built. The inn was located just west of the 1953 station site, approximately where the Paoli Post Office stood in 2017.



image courtesy of the Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society

◀ Paoli Station, 1900: The building was small but had a commanding hilltop presence. It had a side-gabled roof with a wide overhang supported by wood brackets. A wide shed dormer projected from the roof on the track side, and a gabled dormer projected from the side that would have faced the present-day parking lot. The station featured leaded glass windows and a pair of chimneys projecting from the roof near the center of the building.

## 1883 Passenger Station

The PRR began building stations along the Main Line shortly after acquiring the tracks of the old P&C, however, the construction of stations slowed during the 1860s due to impacts of the Civil War. Construction slowed again between 1873 and 1881 due to a widespread economic depression, but resumed fully in the 1880s.

By 1883, the PRR contracted with William H. Burns, a Berwyn builder, to construct a passenger station at Paoli. While the station's architect is officially unknown, Washington Bleddyn Powell, the architect for the PRR, was a signatory on the construction contract and Wilson Brothers & Co., an

architectural firm, took credit for the design.

Station construction occurred after a track realignment project through Paoli that was initiated in the early 1880s. The two-track line was increased to four tracks and was relocated slightly to the north, on its present-day alignment. A trench was excavated through a hill east of North Valley Road to lay the tracks. The trench essentially created two hills.

The new Paoli passenger station was built in 1883 at the top of the south hill, at approximately the same location of the station building in use in 2017. Passengers had to walk down

as many as 50 steps to get to the platforms, and baggage and freight had to be hauled up and down the hill via a ramp from the platforms to the station. Passengers crossed to the opposite tracks via the North Valley Road Bridge, a distance of around 450 feet. The bridge was constructed around the same time as the station (see page 5).

In the 1890s, canopies were added to the eastbound and westbound platforms to shelter passengers waiting to board trains. The canopies were of a standard design that were added to many of the stations on the line in those years.

▼ As part of the 1883 station construction, a passenger shelter was built at the top of the hill on the north side of the tracks (left, circa 1905). Stairs covered by a canopy led to the westbound platform. The Victorian-style shelter was still in use in 2017 (right).



courtesy Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society





► **Railroad crew and locomotive in Paoli, circa 1900:**

By the early 1900s, Philadelphia's suburban population had grown substantially. Additionally, affluent city dwellers spent their summers at hotels and boarding houses in the country along the Main Line. The area was at a higher elevation, which made it cooler and more pleasant than residing in the city in hot weather, and many city dwellers traveled to the area by train.

Executives of the PRR, who rapidly accumulated a great deal of wealth with the success of the railroad, built stately homes along the Main Line. This allowed them to observe the line's operation, enjoy the pleasant setting, and conveniently commute to work in the city in plush private rail cars.

The new Main Line residents



image courtesy of the Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society

used their influence to bring about improvements to commuter service, which in turn increased the frequency of service and desirability of the area. This spurred many more city dwellers to relocate and become commuters on the Paoli Local. To

accommodate increased ridership on the line, the PRR began running trains with additional cars. As a result, Paoli Station's platforms had to be lengthened in 1933 to allow passengers to board and disembark the longer trains.

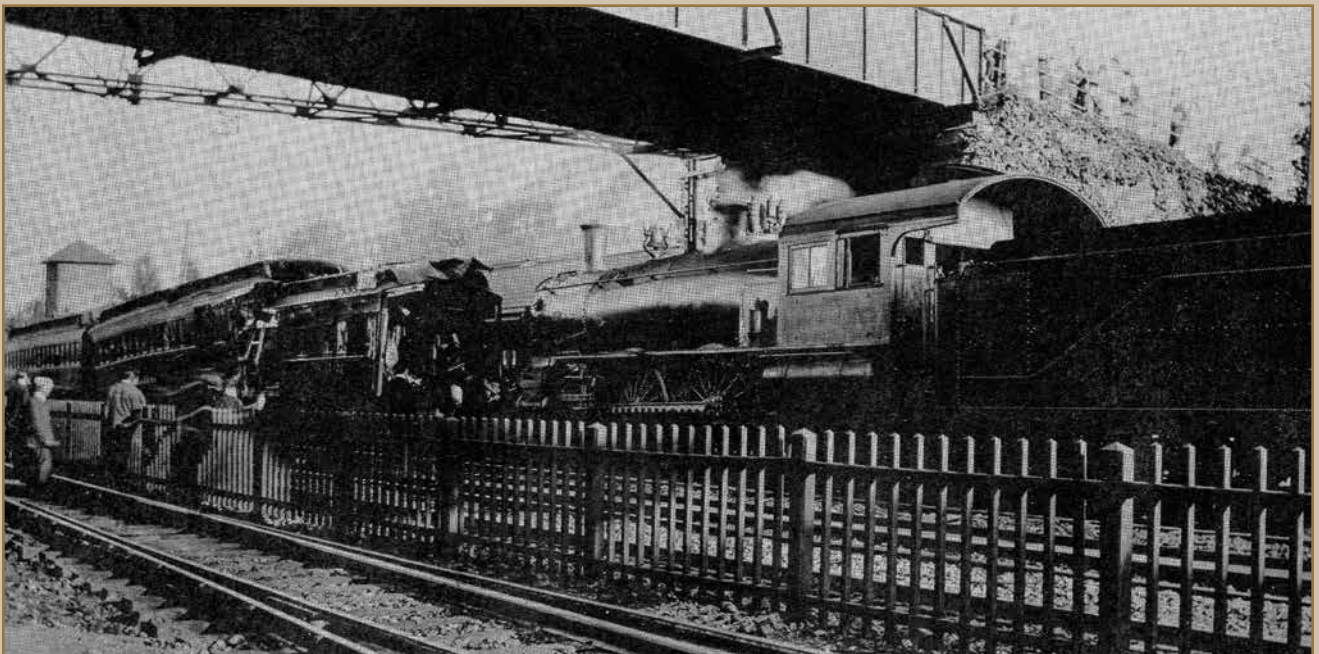


image courtesy of the Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society

## **The Wreck of 1905**

Paoli Station was the site of a passenger train wreck on September 25, 1905. An eastbound New York Limited express train out of St. Louis collided with a local passenger train that was stopped at Paoli Station. The accident badly damaged the private car of Pennsy's General Manager, William Atterbury, which was attached to the rear of the local train. Five men were killed, all employees of the railroad who were in the private car at the time, and 20 passengers were injured in the accident. N.S. Bromall, engineer of the New York Limited, was blamed for causing the accident by ignoring the signals. Bromall reportedly stated that he could not see the signals, as his vision was obscured by steam from a passing freight train.

## North Valley Road Bridge

The bridge that in 2017 carried North Valley Road over the tracks, just west of Paoli Station, was constructed by the PRR around the same time that the trackage was increased from two to four sets and the 1883 PRR passenger station was constructed. The bridge was designed to provide a route for pedestrians and wagons to cross from one side of the tracks to the other.

For many years, local residents called for an improved rail crossing.

The West Chester Local newspaper reported as early as 1926 that concerned residents lobbied the PRR to improve pedestrian safety by constructing an underpass that would allow pedestrians and vehicles to cross the tracks below grade. An article published on October 8, 1926, stated: "It was pointed out that the bridge has always been dangerous for pedestrians and is becoming more dangerous daily as motor traffic increases."

Discussions in 1926 resulted in a decision that the PRR would add a pedestrian footway to the bridge instead of building a tunnel. Although a 3-foot walkway was constructed, calls for a safer underpass crossing continued.

In a 1948 article in the Upper Main Line News, the bridge was called "one antique nobody wants." At that time, concerned citizens called for the construction of a two-lane underpass with a 14-foot clearance and a pedestrian walkway, but it was never built. The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission insisted that the cost, projected to be well over \$600,000, wasn't warranted because there was not enough traffic using the existing bridge.

A January 19, 1951, article in the Upper Main Line News announced that the PRR was planning the construction of an 8-foot sidewalk on the bridge. The article called the project "a slap in the face under the guise of public service." The sidewalk was constructed in the following years and has been used for pedestrian access at Paoli Station ever since.



image courtesy of the Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society

▲ North Valley Road Bridge looking east toward station, circa 1910.

▼ North Valley Road Bridge in 2017, looking west from the Paoli Station parking lot. The bridge is a steel girder structure composed of four steel I-beams resting on stone abutments with concrete caps.



▼ The bridge's sidewalk in 2017.





## Interlocking Tower

The interlocking tower at Paoli Station was constructed by the PRR in 1896. It was designed to house signal equipment and an operator to coordinate the movement of trains through the track arrangements to prevent collisions. It has a brick base on a stone foundation, with a second story constructed of wood framing.

A curved oriel window that once projected from the second story on the side facing the main line tracks was destroyed, supposedly in a crash in the late 1960s, and was never replaced. While several reports indicate the occurrence of the crash that damaged the window, none provide details regarding how or when the crash actually occurred. A 2011 report that mentions the loss of the window states, "In field interviews with various Amtrak personnel who worked at Paoli Tower, everyone remembered the crash, but nobody could remember when it occurred." The circumstances of the crash that damaged the window, therefore, remain a mystery. The interlocking tower was still in use in 2017.

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"The new tower erected at the Paoli station by the Pennsylvania Railroad Company is now about finished, and will be used for the first time Sunday morning. The tower is equipped with interlocking switches, and there will be but few towers along the Main Line that will be as well-equipped as the one at Paoli."

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West Chester Morning Republican  
March 12, 1896



image courtesy of the Tredyffrin Easttown  
Historical Society

▲ Paoli Rail Yard, interlocking tower, and catenary structures just west of Paoli Station, early 1900s.

▼ Interlocking tower, trackage, and catenary looking west, 2017.

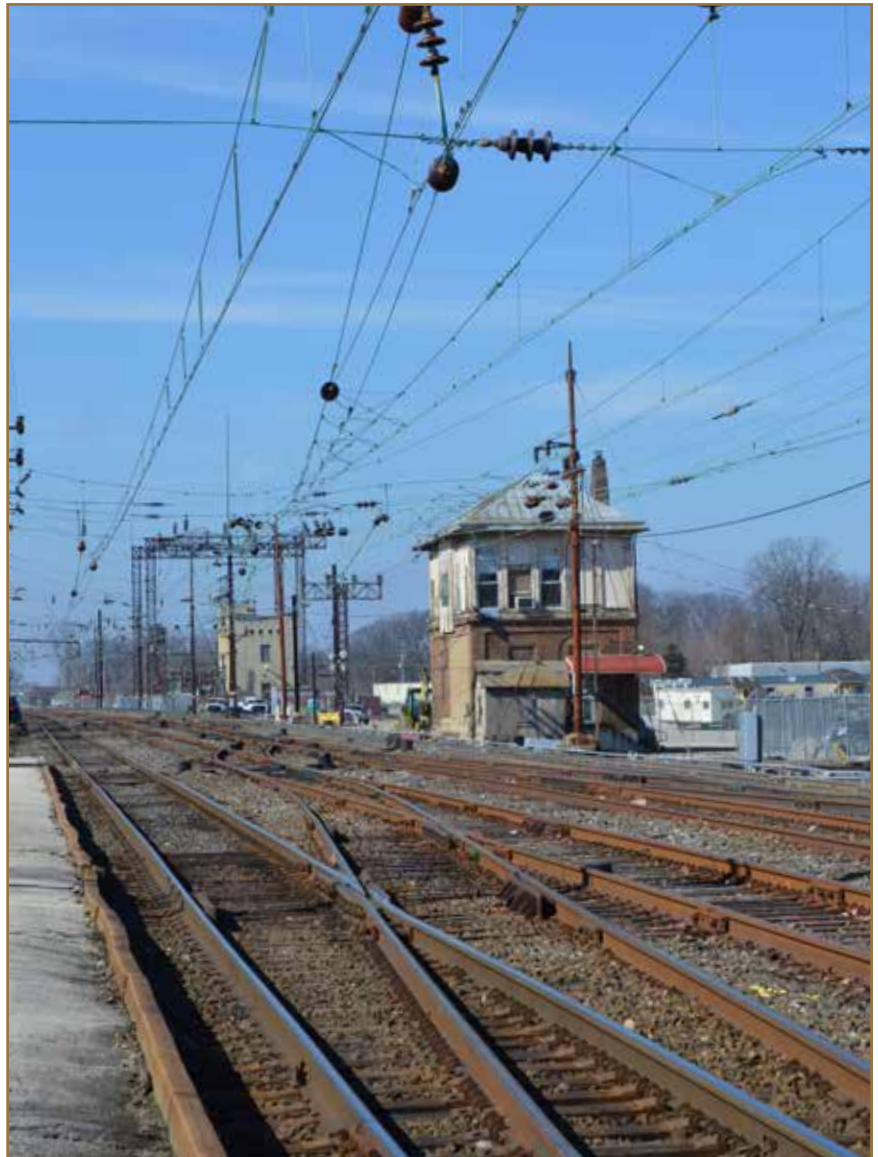






image courtesy of the Chester County Historical Society

◀ In 1972 a PRR freight train derailed and one of its cars crashed through the masonry base of the Paoli interlocking tower. The damage was repaired using bricks of a lighter color, and the infill could still be seen in 2017.



▲ Paoli interlocking tower viewed from the north parking lot, 2017.



▲ View of the interlocking tower from the westbound platform, just east of the North Valley Road Bridge, 2017.

## Electrification and Catenary

As traffic on the Main Line continued to increase due to the sustained uptick in ridership and the addition of more frequent trains, measures were taken to alleviate congestion at Philadelphia's stations. Additional tracks were added, and in the early 1900s, the Market Street Bridge over the Schuylkill River was expanded to help speed up traffic to and from the PRR's Broad Street Station.

To further improve efficiency, it

was decided to electrify the Main Line service from Philadelphia to Paoli, converting the commuter trains from steam to electric power. To determine the best system for electrifying the line, a one-mile-long test area was established between Wayne and St. Davids. Ultimately, the electrification project used an overhead catenary wire system rather than a third rail system which had been used at that time with marginal success on

other regional commuter rail lines. Electrification began in 1913 and the line between Paoli and Philadelphia was fully electrified by 1915.

Trains continuing west had to stop at Paoli Station to change from electric to steam-powered engines. The PRR began electrification of the line west of Paoli in 1936 and it was completed to Harrisburg in 1937, at a cost to the railroad of approximately \$4 million.



image courtesy of the Hagley Museum and Library

◀ Station building and North Valley Road Bridge looking west, circa 1955.

▼ Undated photo of westbound shelter on north side of the tracks.



image courtesy of the Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society



image courtesy of the Hagley Museum and Library

▲ Passengers disembark at Paoli, circa 1955. By 1953 there were 139 daily commuter trains running along the Main Line between Paoli and Philadelphia.

## 1953 Station

The members of the Paoli Business Association campaigned for a new, modern station building to replace the 1883 station at Paoli, which was regarded as outdated, for some time before the PRR agreed in 1952. By 1953, the new station was complete.

The new station building on the south side of the tracks was 90 by 27 feet, and constructed of buff brick. To reduce the inconvenience of the many steps needed to reach the platform from the 1883 station, the site was leveled on the south side, and the new building was constructed at the same elevation as the eastbound platform. The leveling of the site also provided the opportunity for a large parking lot to accommodate travelers arriving at the station by car. The station building included a large passenger waiting room, a ticket office, and a small news shop. A new passenger shelter was constructed on the westbound platform, and a wood canopy at the top of the north hill dating to the 1883 station was left in place.

◀ View from the stairs connecting the north parking lot to the westbound platform, 2017. When the 1953 station was constructed, the 1883 north lot shelter and stair canopy were retained and integrated into the design of the westbound platform structure.

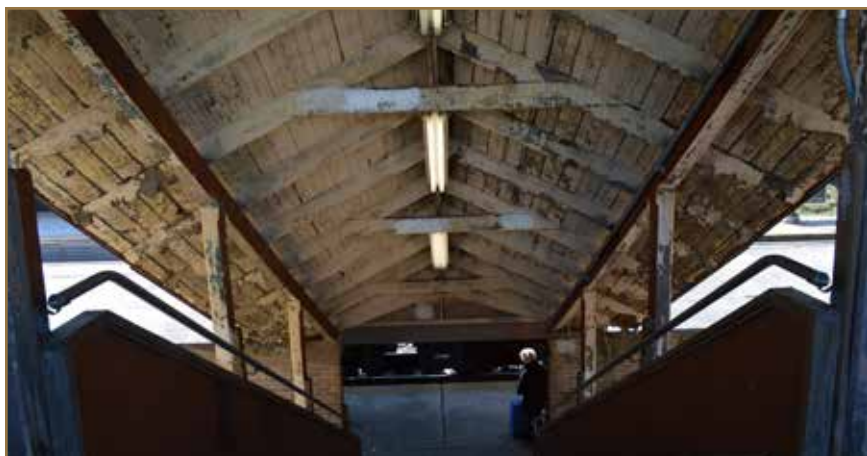






image courtesy of the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania

◀ Passengers at Paoli Station in the early 1950s. Despite steady ridership for commuter trains in the Philadelphia area, 1958 was the last profitable year for the PRR as a whole.

## Decline of the Pennsylvania Railroad

World War II was a difficult time for railroads throughout the U.S., which suffered a lack of funds and a decline in ridership. While the Pennsy's lines were in heavy use during the war transporting U.S. Army freight and even German prisoners of war, the end of the war marked the beginning of the end for the PRR. Although the railroad company continued to hang on through the war, and remained active in transporting passengers and freight, the PRR in 1946 reported a net loss for the first time in its history. Increased automobile traffic as a result of the Interstate Highway Act of the 1950s, as well as the construction of the Schuylkill Expressway—which

offered local commuters an attractive alternative to trains—threatened the dominance of the PRR in the region.

Despite efforts to reduce fares and increase service on commuter rail lines, use of the lines continued to decline. A further setback came in Winter 1957-58, with many heavy snows disrupting rail traffic as crews had to “dig out” the rail line time and time again, straining the PRR's budgets. From 1958 until the railroad's ultimate bankruptcy in 1970 following its failed merger with the New York Central Railroad, the PRR continued to face diminished ridership and never turned a profit again.

## SEPTA and Amtrak



▲ The Paoli Local arrives at Paoli Station, May 13, 1972, en route to Philadelphia.



▲ An eastbound SEPTA commuter rail train approaches Paoli Station, June 1, 2017.

As the PRR declined, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) was created by the Pennsylvania legislature in 1963 to oversee government funding for various transportation and railroad companies in Southeastern Pennsylvania, including the PRR.

In 1970, the U.S. Congress passed the Rail Passenger Service Act. This legislation established the National Railroad Passenger Corporation to take over the intercity passenger rail service that had been operated by private railroads. Amtrak began service on May 1, 1971, serving 43 states with a total of 21 routes, which included the route of the former PRR Main Line. While Amtrak provided intercity rail service, changes to federal legislation in 1983 resulted in SEPTA assuming control of the region's commuter rail lines and service.

Today, Amtrak, SEPTA, and PennDOT carry on the PRR's legacy of providing service to travelers on the railway. Consistent with the federal Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) of 2008, operation of the Amtrak *Keystone Service* and *Pennsylvanian* are financed primarily through funds made available by PennDOT. Amtrak owns, maintains, and dispatches the corridor between Philadelphia and Harrisburg, including the tracks that SEPTA uses to operate commuter service on the Paoli–Thorndale Line.



## Paoli Station, 2017 and Beyond

Paoli remains an important station for local and regional travelers, serving more than 200,000 Amtrak and 700,000 SEPTA passengers in 2016 alone. However, the 1953 passenger station is not fully accessible to persons with disabilities, and the station, rail infrastructure, and site are in need of modernization.

Amtrak, SEPTA, and PennDOT have partnered to provide the necessary upgrades. Construction began in 2017 on the first of three proposed phases of major improvements to develop Paoli Station into a fully ADA-compliant, modernized, intermodal passenger station.



▲ Paoli Station looking north, 2017.



▲ North (westbound) platform shelter and covered stairs to 1883 shelter and north parking lot, 2017.



▲ South (eastbound) platform and station building looking east, 2017.



▲ Station building and North Valley Road Bridge looking west, 2017.



▲ Station building facing the south parking lot, 2017. Stairs to North Valley Road Bridge, which provides access to the opposite platform, are visible.





▲ North Valley Road Bridge looking east, 2017. The north platform structures are visible under the bridge.



▲ North Valley Road Bridge looking west, 2017. The south (eastbound) platform is in view.



▲ Station building interior, 2017.



▲ Station building viewed from the westbound platform, 2017.



▲ The groundbreaking ceremony for the Paoli Station Accessibility Improvements Project, February 23, 2017.

image courtesy of SEPTA



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