



UPPER: Shoving hard on the rear end of a heavy ore train, two Baldwin-built diesel road-switchers provide 4,800 additional horsepower to the head-end locomotives, as the train struggles upgrade through Rosemont on June 11, 1960. *Courtesy of Frank Tatnall.*

MIDDLE: On April 6, 1894, an agreement was signed between the Pennsylvania Railroad and Berwyn businessman W. H. Fritz to have a private rail siding constructed immediately south of the Main Line and behind the Fritz lumber barns. The siding was used primarily to accommodate coal hoppers, and the last delivery was made in the early 1970s. The siding was disconnected from the No. 1 track a decade later, but the rails and crossties were not fully removed. This image shows the remains of the Fritz Siding on August 19, 2016. *Courtesy of Roger D. Thorne.*

LOWER: Taken by the Dallin Aerial Survey Co. in May 1931, this image looks northwest from over the Devon Horse Show at the twin sidings at Devon on the south side of the PRR Main Line. The closest siding was expressly to accommodate "horse Pullmans" chartered by wealthy horse owners at Horse Show time. The second siding was used in conjunction with the Devon freight station, although it appears that the track is being used by additional Horse Show traffic. *Courtesy of Hagley Museum and Library.*

could be dumped into trucks. By 1980, all of these sidings were either gone or out of use, but the remnants of at least one of the sidings and trestles are still visible.

In 1945, there were 11 public delivery ("team") tracks still in service on the Main Line, including one at the Devon freight house. Although that track was abandoned years ago, the elevated concrete unloading platform still remains. Also in Devon, to the east of the freight house, was a siding where the so-called "horse Pullmans" carrying entrants to the Devon Horse Show could be spotted for unloading. Because these tracks, as well as the other public and private sidings, were removed years ago, the "peddlers" are no longer needed. In addition, all of the freight station buildings, which were separate from the passenger stations, have been demolished except in Bryn Mawr. Here, the former freight building was repurposed several years ago into a restaurant called "Tango," and its management expanded the dining room by using space formerly occupied by the rail siding.

While the railroad industry at large was experiencing wrenching changes, SEPTA's commuter service continued to expand. After the General Electric cars arrived in the 1970s, the next major development occurred in late 1984 when the new \$330-million Center City commuter tunnel was completed. SEPTA could then operate through-service across the former PRR and Reading sides of what is now referred to as its Regional Rail system. This connection eliminated the need for originating and terminating trains at Reading Terminal or at the previously "stub-end" Suburban Station. Now, most trains run through the mile-long tunnel joining both sides of the system.

Also, in the mid-1980s SEPTA instituted an "R" nomenclature to identify each of its commuter lines. Paoli became part of the R5 line, which matched up with the former Reading route to Lansdale and Doylestown. This could result in the unusual sight of former Reading heavyweight "Blueliner" MU cars, built in 1931, operating to Paoli and other stations on the Main Line side of the R5. One could even occasionally see a former PRR GG1 locomotive pulling old Reading coaches on the Paoli Local! (The "R" system was discarded in 2010 as being too confusing to unwary riders in Center City, who sometimes found themselves boarding trains with the same route number but going in the opposite direction from their destination.)

SEPTA built two new train yards and maintenance shops, one at Frazer opening in 1988, and the other at Overbrook in 1995. This allowed the closure of the 80-year-old Paoli car shop and its adjacent yard in January of 1995. Over the next two years a massive Superfund project was carried out on the former shop property to remove all traces of the PCB chemicals used for decades as a coolant in the motor transformers of the electric cars, but subsequently identified as a carcinogen.

At the time of this writing, another major project is underway at Paoli. After more than 20 years of discussions and planning, work began on the \$86-million Paoli Transportation Center in early 2017, and the steel bones of the center were largely in place by mid-2018. Funded both by Amtrak and SEPTA, completion of the first phase of the extensive project is expected sometime in 2019. The project has seen the removal of the two now unneeded center tracks through Paoli, to be replaced by a high-level center platform. (The only station on the Main Line which already can boast of full-length high-level platforms—which allow faster boarding and detraining—is Wayne.) At Paoli station, all SEPTA and Amtrak trains now use only the two outer tracks, designated by the railroad as numbers 1 and 4. A large pedestrian overpass is being constructed, complete with elevators, to insure easy access for the wheelchair-bound and other handicapped passengers, as well as the general ridership. The current one-story Paoli station building, constructed by the PRR in 1953 to replace the beautiful late-19th century station, will not be affected by this phase of the Transportation Center project. It is, however, to be replaced as part of Phase II beginning in 2024. This current construction has resulted in the disassembly and storage of the historic wooden passenger shelter which stood on the westbound side of the station from 1893. Parts of that passenger shelter are slated to be reassembled somewhere on the station property after construction is completed, for the sake of recognizing the heritage of the old station.

With the opening of Frazer as a maintenance site and crew base in 1988, SEPTA began running a few rush-hour trains to Parkesburg, 44 miles from Philadelphia, but by 1995 low ridership had spelled the end of that service. For a time, the trains were turned back at Downingtown until a new station and parking area were constructed at Thorndale in 1999. Located at milepost 35, just west of Downingtown, the current terminus earns equal billing with Paoli on the cover of SEPTA's "Paoli/Thorndale Line" timetables, effectively rendering obsolete a name that had been revered—and sometimes scorned—for generations: the "Paoli Local."

Responding to the more reliable service offered by SEPTA, ridership on the Regional Rail system grew by almost 35 percent over the period from 2000 to 2017. Even with the addition of seven sets of "push-pull" locomotive-hauled trains from Bombardier Inc. of Montreal in 1987, which were powered by new AEM-7 electric locomotives from General Motors, there still was not enough equipment to meet the demand. Observing this trend in ridership, in 2006 SEPTA ordered 120 new "Silverliner V" MU cars from the South Korean company Hyundai-Rotem. Assembled in Philadelphia², the cars encountered serious production delays, but by 2013 all were in service.

Then, in the summer of 2016, structural cracks were found in some of the Silverliner V truck frames, forcing all 120 of the cars (which represented a third of the Regional Rail fleet) to be sidelined for repair. SEPTA frantically began borrowing surplus equipment from other agencies, resulting in some very unfamiliar-looking trains on the Main Line. During that summer



UPPER: After Conrail inherited the properties of both the Pennsylvania and Reading Railroads, it found itself saddled with their money-draining commuter operations. But SEPTA as the funding agency often ordered equipment from one "side" of the system to the other via the new center city tunnel that linked the two railroads. An example is this five-car set of sturdy Reading "Blueliner" cars, built in 1931, passing the deactivated Bryn Mawr electrical substation enroute to Paoli on May 9, 1986. *Courtesy of Frank Tatnall.*

MIDDLE: The Frazer, Pa. car shop opened in 1988, and with the closure of the Paoli shop in 1995, many employees were transferred to Frazer. The shop is now in a \$139-million expansion project to handle the new locomotives and multilevel car fleet that SEPTA has ordered, plus adding more yard tracks. The single track seen on the left is the remnant of the former PRR Trenton branch ("Trenton Cut-off"), formerly a busy electrified line for through freights. It is now only used once-a-day by Norfolk Southern for service from the Abrams yard near Bridgeport to ArcelorMittal at Coatesville. *Courtesy of Roger D. Thorne.*

LOWER: With the Paoli station at the lower left, and North Valley Road bisecting it, this image, taken October 15, 2015, shows the site of the former Paoli railyard and Car Shop at which so much railroad history was made. Much of the yard remains "off limits" following PCB clean-up efforts, but one can spot two remaining points of local history: the 1896 Paoli Interlocking Tower and the 1915 electrical sub-station—both of which are in operation today. *Courtesy of Roger D. Thorne.*



UPPER: This aerial image of the ongoing construction of the Paoli Transportation Center, looking east down the Main Line tracks, was taken on June 26, 2018. Beyond the 19th century Valley Road bridge can be seen the steel girders of the large pedestrian overpass which had just been connected, and the numerous piers for the high-level platform between the two outer tracks, designated as numbers 1 and 4. *Courtesy of Roger D. Thorne.*

MIDDLE: With the intention of later reassembly somewhere on the site of the Paoli Transportation Center, the westbound Paoli passenger shelter (or shed) originally built around 1893, was carefully taken apart for storage in this image taken on September 11, 2017. *Courtesy of Roger D. Thorne.*

LOWER: Powered by one of SEPTA's aging AEM-7 electric locomotives, the "Great Valley Flyer" express to Paoli slows for the curve at Berwyn on the afternoon of August 17, 2015. At four degrees, the "Berwyn Curve" is the most severe on the Main Line between Philadelphia and Harrisburg, and historically carried a mandatory speed restriction of 50 miles per hour. *Courtesy of Frank Tatnall.*

and fall, it was not unusual to see Paoli-Thorndale rush-hour trains including the *Great Valley Flyer* powered by an Amtrak ACS-64 electric locomotive, with five or six coaches rented from the Maryland commuter agency MARC, and a SEPTA cab control car on the opposite end! The Silverliner Vs were repaired and returned to service, as SEPTA continued planning for even more growth on its Regional Rail system. Delivery of 15 new Siemens ACS-64 electric locomotives was completed in October 2018, and 45 double-deck passenger cars are on order. The *Flyer*, operating with a new ACS-64 "Sprinter" locomotive, remains the only named train on the entire SEPTA system. It runs a fast non-stop schedule during peak hours between Paoli and 30th Street Station in Philadelphia, while providing local service between Paoli and Thorndale.

It is remarkable that the Pennsylvania Railroad's 1915-era physical plant is still largely intact on the Main Line to Paoli, so much so that it is considered a candidate for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Rarely do so many relics of railroading's past survive in such close proximity today. On the Main Line, these include the original electrical system with its tubular poles, the many distinctive stone-arch bridges, the PRR's trademark position-light signals, the virtually unchanged right-of-way, the 11 active station buildings that date from the 19th century, and the three manned signal towers ("Zoo," "Overbrook" and "Paoli") which remain in service while nearly everywhere else in America these manually-operated towers have been replaced by remotely-controlled centers. Amtrak itself has a Centralized Electric & Traffic Control Center (CETC) in Wilmington which oversees the Northeast Corridor, but a long-range plan to replace the century-old electrical system on the Paoli-Harrisburg Line, as well as transferring full control of train operations into CETC, awaits the necessary funding. To date, the only major modernization project undertaken on the Main Line has been Amtrak's replacement of all wooden crossties and jointed "clickety-clack" rail with new "ribbon" welded rail and long-lasting concrete ties.

Today, the "Paoli Local" as such, really is no more. With the extension of virtually all local service on the Main Line to Malvern and Thorndale, SEPTA originates only two weekday trains at Paoli and three others terminate there. These five trains actually operate to and from the Frazer yard, "deadheading" beyond Paoli. But, in spite of the official terminology used by SEPTA, many Main Line commuters of a certain age may still refer to their trains as the "Paoli Local." They may even hold to the sentiment expressed by the well-known Philadelphia novelist Christopher Morley, who was born in Haverford. Morley some years ago wrote a paean to Broad Street Station in which he expressed his belief that, to the true Main Liner, "Nothing was so holy as the Local to Paoli."

About the Author

Frank Tatnall was a railroader for 38 years, starting with the Pennsylvania, then successors Penn Central and Conrail. He worked in the Marketing & Sales Department, but always stayed in close contact with the railroad's operations. Reassigned ten times during his career to such cities as Baltimore, Detroit, Kansas City, Louisville, Columbus, Pittsburgh and Cincinnati, he gained a wide perspective on the operations of his own railroad and many other lines. Frank is also involved in rail historical activities, having served as president of the Philadelphia Chapters of both the Pennsylvania Railroad Technical & Historical Society and the National Railway Historical Society. In 2015 he wrote an article for *Classic Trains Magazine* commemorating the 100th anniversary of the electrification of the Main Line to Paoli. Frank grew up in the Chestnut Hill area but has resided in Radnor with his wife Mary for the past 19 years.

Notes

1. Goshorn, Bob, "Devon Inn," *Tredyffrin Easttown History Club Quarterly* Vol. 22 No. 4 (October 1984): pp. 125-138. <http://www.tehistory.org/hqda/html/v22/v22n4p125.html>
2. On August 17, 2018, Korean-owned Hyundai Rotem announced the closing of its 10-year-old, 300,000-square-foot factory on Weccacoe Avenue in South Philadelphia and vacating the premises by the end of August. "The factory built 120 Silverliner V commuter cars for SEPTA, starting in 2009, and finished a couple of later car-refurbishing contracts for the transit agency by 2016. It was that summer that the wide-windowed cars had to be returned for welding repairs, leading to months of train schedule cuts and overcrowding. SEPTA and Hyundai Rotem blamed the problem on a Pittsburgh-area welding subcontractor." Joseph N. DiStefano, "Philly railcar maker Hyundai Rotem gives up and leaves town," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 17, 2018, <http://www.philly.com/philly/blogs/inq-phillydeals/septa-hyundai-rotem-crrc-rail-cars-philadelphia-20180817.html> (accessed August 21, 2018).

RIGHT UPPER: Possibly the oldest bridge on the Main Line creates this very low underpass on East Conestoga Road in Devon. The original three-track stone-arch span was enlarged to accommodate a fourth track when the Main Line was widened in 1883. *Courtesy of Frank Tatnall.*

RIGHT LOWER: Devon station was built in 1883 at a time when one of the popular architectural embellishments was the lavish and decorative Victorian-era style known as "gingerbread." Devon station had a touch of gingerbread trim in its outbound shelter depicting these gargoyle figures. Remarkably, the display remains undamaged after 135 years, while the gingerbread designs at other Main Line stations of that era have been less fortunate. *Courtesy of Frank Tatnall.*



UPPER: In an effort to avoid a looming equipment shortage, SEPTA in 2006 ordered 120 newly-designed electric cars, dubbed "Silverliner V." Featuring unusual quarter-point doors, the brightly-painted cars were delivered from Hyundai-Rotem's Philadelphia plant in 2011-2013, but in the summer of 2016 all had to be sidelined when cracks were discovered in the truck frames. After the defective parts were replaced the entire fleet was returned to service by yearend. A five-car Paoli-Thorndale local makes a stop at Bryn Mawr station on March 17, 2017. *Courtesy of Frank Tatnall.*

LOWER: During the Silverliner V absence, SEPTA was forced to borrow equipment from other agencies to fill some of the resulting service gaps. A fleet of 26 unpowered coaches was leased from the Maryland Transit Administration, New Jersey Transit supplied an electric locomotive and eight cars, and Amtrak leased five of its new ACS-64 electric locomotives plus a five-car trainset to SEPTA. In this scene, Paoli-Thorndale train no. 9547 is approaching Devon station on October 4, 2016, with an Amtrak ACS-64 leading five Maryland cars. SEPTA liked what it saw and ordered 15 identical ACS-64s for Paoli-Thorndale and other lines, the first of these locomotives entering service in summer 2018. *Courtesy of Frank Tatnall.*

