

The Stop at Paoli

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Beginnings at the Paoli

The founder and first license holder of a “public house of entertainment” in Tredyffrin Township, Chester County, alternately called the General Paoli Tavern, the Paoli Tavern, the Paoli Inn, or simply “the Paoli,” was 37-year-old Joshua Evans in 1769. This public house was named after the legendary Corsican patriot Pasquale (Pascal) Paoli. The tavern originally had a rather small footprint of some 42 x 30 feet, but it was to grow substantially in the succeeding years. Soon after the British evacuated Philadelphia in June 1778, westward traffic from Philadelphia flourished, and the Paoli was a beneficiary of this growth. The first of several additions was made to the original inn at that time.

But not until the completion of the Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike in 1794 did the era of great prosperity commence for the Paoli Inn. The turnpike ran directly in front of the tavern, and thus all traffic passing along the new highway channeled directly beside the house. Once again, the inn’s ability to well-serve its patrons having been strained, a large 81 x 38 foot addition facing the turnpike was completed in 1812.

Of the eleven inns which stood along the Lancaster Turnpike between Spread Eagle (today’s Strafford) and Paoli, only three, the Spread Eagle Tavern, the General Jackson Inn (in Paoli), and the Paoli Inn, gained the top level of reputation as well-kept stage coach hostelries preferred by the upper-class travelling public. The other inns, generally called “wagon taverns” or “drove stands,” tended to be rougher but less expensive, and catered to a different class of patrons including drovers and commercial travelers.

In 1828, when Major John Wilson was commissioned to lay out the route for the railway between Philadelphia and Columbia, it was said that the survey of the right-of-way logically located itself from Columbia to the General Warren Tavern (Malvern) without much controversy. But from that point east, difficulties presented themselves with regard to finding the most favorable route for leaving the Great Chester Valley. The original route was to pass from the Warren down from the south ridge and through the Valley toward Howellville, and then climb back up the South Valley Hill towards the Spread Eagle Tavern (Strafford). This route would have completely cut off the Paoli from the contemplated railroad. But sufficient political influence, and the demands of Joshua Evans’ son, General Joshua Evans, Jr., resulted in a reconsidered route which passed due east from the Warren directly toward the Paoli Tavern.¹

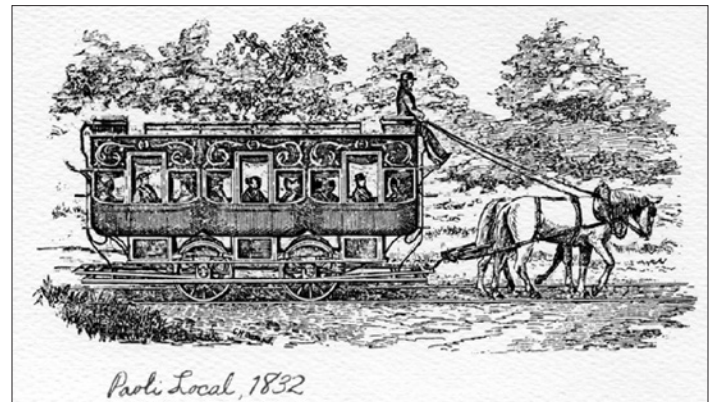
On October 18, 1832, the first horse-drawn car on the Columbia Railroad travelled over the new single track from the Belmont Incline on the Schuylkill River in Philadelphia, and passed the Paoli to the Green Tree Inn (east of Malvern), carrying the United States mail and thirty passengers. Rail service would soon expand, and because the Columbia & Philadelphia Railroad (C&P) had no passenger stations of its own, it relied on established hostelries to act as stations, restaurants, and fueling stops. In these early days of the C&P, the Paoli Tavern soon became one of the most important stopping places upon this entire rail highway.

With the beginning of the “steam age” on the Columbia Railroad, reliable sources of wood for fuel and water to maintain steam pressure were needed at intervals all along the line. General Evans, at the first introduction of steam locomotion in 1834, wisely arranged for a wood and water station to be constructed on his property near the tavern. Trains would routinely re-supply with wood and water at the Paoli when they made their routine stops, aided by men employed by Evans who split the wood and loaded it onto the small tender cars attached to the locomotives. It is recorded that the next “official” woodshed west of Paoli was at Downingtown, and east of Paoli at Morgan’s Corners (Radnor).²

It was said that the activity and bustle at the Paoli in those early railroad days was probably unequaled at any similar establishment in Pennsylvania. Historian Julius Sachse described the scene:

“Whenever a train arrived, the train hands would call out ‘all out, five minutes for refreshments,’ and the passengers would rush to the bar, through the four large doors facing the track, until the room was packed, but even those within reach of the counter would hardly have time to gulp down their coffee and doughnut or sandwich before the bell would ring and the train start at the command ‘all aboard,’ while the passengers were left to scramble into the cars with their luncheon in their hands as best they were able.”³

By the 1840s, the expanding Paoli Inn—in addition to its significant railroad-related business—was fast becoming a popular summer resort and boarding destination. Increasingly, year by year, some of Philadelphia’s most prominent citizens would easily journey to Paoli by rail to spend their summers in the country. With the death of Gen. Joshua Evans Jr. in 1846, his son John D. Evans became the Paoli’s proprietor. John soon realized that the needs of his frenetic, demanding, and growing rail passenger clientele was incompatible with the slower ambiance preferred at a summer resort. So, late in 1846, John D. Evans decided to break ground just east of the old inn for a stand-alone structure facing the Columbia railroad tracks where the Valley Road then crossed at grade-level.⁴ Evans called his new structure the Paoli Hotel (although the community often referred to it as the John Evans Hotel), and it served as Paoli’s railroad station for an indeterminate period until it is reported that a small frame building was built just south of the Paoli Hotel to handle the explicit station duties.⁵



The Paoli Hotel, which would also serve for many years as the Paoli post office, is described as having two stories, with porches in the front and rear. The lower floor offered the traveling public a large eating area, with a counter on the south side specifically for selling lunches and coffee. Of especial importance to the traveling public was the hotel's large bar for the sale of beer and spirits, and which extended along the south and west side of the first floor.

Paoli in the Era of the Pennsylvania Railroad

Within several years after the Commonwealth's sale of the Main Line of Public Works to the Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR) in 1857, the small village of Paoli was made the terminus for all local trains—the accommodation trains—from Philadelphia. To best serve the increasing number of accommodation trains at the end of their run, in 1864 a wye* was constructed in Paoli just northwest from the Inn and the Hotel, now allowing these trains to easily turn around for their return trip. And in 1870, the PRR completed a new brick roundhouse in the growing Paoli yard.

As discussed in the preceding “Brief Overview...” article, almost the entire right-of-way of the original Columbia & Philadelphia Railroad had been laid to follow the contours of the topography. The consequence of this decision was an overabundance of track curves, many of them quite severe, which, as railroading matured, reduced optimum speeds and increased maintenance. Not until the mid-1870s did the PRR undertake a concerted effort

to realign the roadbeds to reduce these curves and grades, and also to widen the route to add more trackage to accommodate increasing traffic.

The work of straightening the serpentine trackage around Paoli started in the early spring of 1876. The *Downingtown Archive* reported: “This job of straightening will probably require more labor than any of the other alterations along the line. The new line will do away with several very short and dangerous curves. The work of grading will be very heavy and will require a very large force of men and a long time to complete it.” Yet by April of that year the contractor assigned to the job, Samuel Lemmon, already had 30 crews beginning to reduce grade variations through Paoli, and a new straightened Paoli cut was ultimately 28 feet in depth. Which leads us back to John D. Evans.

On January 11, 1876 the *West Chester Daily Local News* had confidently reported that “The Pennsylvania Railroad Company is ... looking towards the purchase of John D. Evans’ hotel property at Paoli.” But these negotiations had collapsed, and the PRR soon received permission to use *eminent domain* proceedings on parts of Evans’ farm in order to commence the straightening effort on schedule. In reading contemporary newspapers, one quickly discerns an editorial bias in favor of the railroad, suggesting that if Evans held out for his price, he might well have ended up causing a larger detriment upon the community of Paoli. On June 28, 1877, the *Daily Local News* critically reported that “... ‘Mine host’ John D. Evans, at the

*A wye is a triangular junction which can be used for reversing the direction of railway equipment. Similar to a three-point turn for an automobile, the direction of a locomotive or railway vehicle can be reversed using a wye, leaving the equipment facing in the direction from which it came.



In 1887–88, local historian Julius Sachse photographed the then-current condition of the legendary Paoli Inn. In the 1880s developers had invested in the revitalization of the Inn with the intent of creating an “answer for a so-called fashionable resort of the present day.” The attempt was not successful, and Sachse captured the former inn unoccupied—a shadow of its former prominence. The image looks east from near the 2020 location of the Paoli post office. To the left of the sprawling structure one can spot the first Paoli signal tower along the realigned PRR tracks, and behind the tower, the recent bridge carrying Valley Road over the tracks north into the Great Valley. *Courtesy of the Herb and Barbara Fry Collection.*

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Paoli, will not or cannot agree with the company [the PRR] as to the worth of his land, and it looks now as if that station may be wiped out altogether and a station made near the old Black Bear property [at today's intersection of Routes 30 and 252 in Paoli] on Hugh J. Steen's land, and the "Y" removed to the Green Tree. The company tire of so much local hostility, and the fate of Parkesburg when the shops were driven away from there ⁶ may be that of the Paoli."

Railroad construction is rough, gritty work today, but in the 1870s, with a challenging lack of the steam-powered equipment that would appear later in the century, the work could be highly dangerous. From contemporary newspaper articles, over 20 men were killed in construction-related accidents while realigning the right-of-way through Chester County alone. But one of the strangest stories of railroad deaths that took place in Paoli from the years 1876–7 was related in *The Post* of Middleburg, PA on September 14, 1876:

"At Paoli, Chester county, Robert Reilly and Terrance McGannan, employed by contractor Lemmon in straightening the Pennsylvania rail at that point, quarreled and fought at midnight. In their struggles they got on the railroad track, and not noticing in their blind fury, that a coal train was coming, they fought on and were struck and instantly killed by the engine as it suddenly swept around a curve. They were carried about a hundred yards on the cowcatcher, and their bodies when picked up, were fearfully mangled. An inquest was held and the train employees were exonerated."

As reported by the *Daily Local News*: "At Paoli yesterday (Sunday, August 5, 1877), connection was made by the new and straightened portion of the main road." The difficult job of straightening the line through Paoli had been completed, but in so doing had cut off from their former close proximity to the tracks both the old inn and the newer Paoli Hotel. The days of prominence for the Paoli were numbered.

In 1881, John D. Evans finally sold the remaining 329 acres of his property, containing the former Paoli Inn and the Paoli Hotel, to the newly-formed Paoli Heights Land Company. Evans had separate licenses to sell alcohol at the Paoli Hotel and the Paoli Inn, and neither of these licenses were kept in force after Evans sold the property to the Paoli Heights Company. The old Evans tract was then sub-divided by the Company into building lots, and advertised for sale. Interestingly, when the Company sold portions of their land from the tract, there were very specific restrictions attached to each deed prohibiting the creation of any taverns or drinking saloons, or for that use. While it is possible that these restrictions were intended to limit competition with the Paoli, we believe the Company owners had a clear prohibitionist intent.⁷ The old Paoli Inn was remodeled to serve as a fashionable suburban resort, but by 1886, after several changes of ownership, the structure sat desolate with no occupant.⁸ The legendary Paoli Inn was finally consumed by fire in 1899. The structure which served as the Paoli Hotel continued to stand just west of Valley Road for another three quarters of a century and was used for various purposes until being razed for redevelopment.



As recorded by Berwyn photographer Lucy Sampson, the gutted ruin of the once-legendary Paoli Inn awaits its final destruction in the aftermath of a devastating conflagration on May 30, 1899. Image courtesy of Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society.

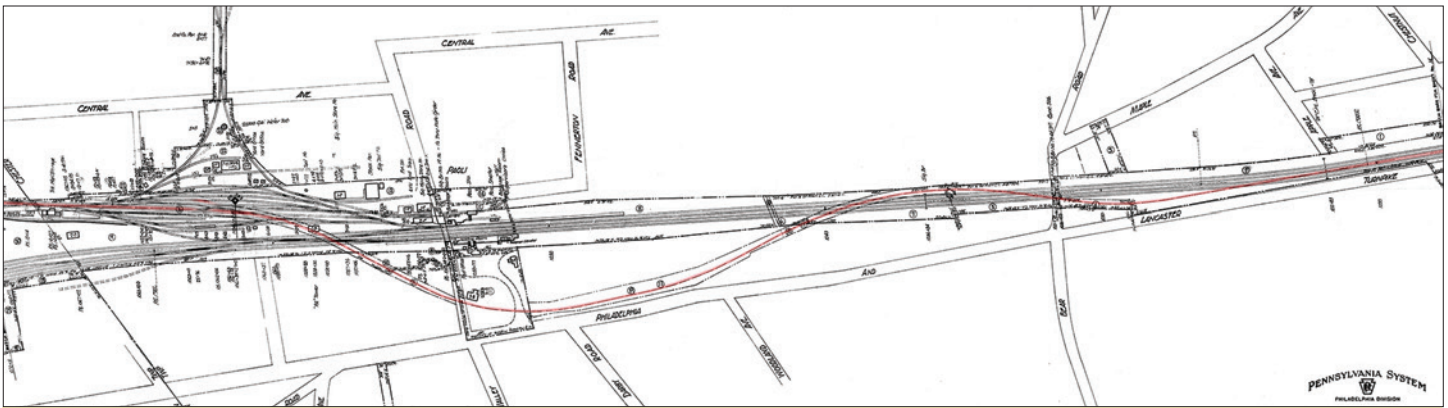


In this never-before-published 1974 image of Paoli at the intersection of South Valley Road at the Lincoln Highway, the two story structure believed to be the former Paoli Hotel (white building, center-right, with the sign ANTIQUES over the door)—built in 1846 as an adjunct to the original Paoli Inn—is shown standing in disrepair. Soon after this photo was taken, the structure was razed, and the site is now occupied by the commercial venture Home Cooked at the eastern end of the Paoli Village Shoppes complex. In May 2019, an historical marker was placed nearby. *Image courtesy of Donna Waldeyer.*

Remembering the Paoli Inn

To commemorate the now long-gone Paoli Inn, and recognize its significance in the history of the community, on 16 May 2019, the Paoli Business & Professional Association (PBPA), supported by TEHS and other organizations, dedicated an historic marker placed near the original site of the building, at the eastern end of the Paoli Village Shoppes on Paoli Plaza, and close to the North Valley Road bridge and the present-day Paoli train station. More photographs and information about the marker dedication ceremony may be found in a short article published in the Spring 2019 issue of the *History Quarterly* (Vol. 54 No. 4, pp. 17–18). (LEFT) The Paoli Inn historical marker after its unveiling at the May 2019 dedication ceremony, flanked by two members of the color guard who participated. (BELOW) Aerial view looking northwest from a photo taken in October 2020, with the marker location indicated by the arrow marked “M” (middle of lower half of photo). *Photos courtesy of Roger D. Thorne.*





From the Pennsylvania Railroad's Philadelphia Division series of "Valuation Maps," originally produced in 1918, this right of way and track map (V-2.1/15) of Paoli shows in orange the serpentine route of the original Columbia Railroad through the village, and the realigned PRR right-of-way bisecting the image, as completed in 1877. This map is provided courtesy of Stephen Titchenal.

The Track Realignment Through Paoli, 1876-77

The wildly undulating route shown on the map above plots the original Columbia & Philadelphia route laid out by Major John Wilson and his survey team before 1830, and initially constructed by 1832. The 1876-7 realignment travelling west from today's Daylesford station left the original right-of-way at Mile Post 19.2 at the former Apple Avenue east of Paoli (near the current intersection of Russell Road at Maple Avenue, just

east of Rte. 252). It passed almost straight on its present path through the village of Paoli, and connected again with the original P&C route west of the former Paoli railyard (removed starting in the mid-1990s), just beyond the former "duck-under track" ⁹ located about 700' east of today's intersection of West Central Ave. with Industrial Blvd.



Track work east of Paoli station, photographed on May 30, 2017, in preparation for the construction of the Paoli Transportation Center. This image reminds the reader of the reality of the "cut" initially constructed for two tracks in 1876-77, in places rising as high as 28 feet above the tracks, and finally widened to its current four-track size in 1893. This "cut" extends from Bear Hill Road (currently Route 252) west past North Valley Road. Courtesy of Roger D. Thorne.

Paoli Potpourri

1. The Many Railway Passenger Stations of Paoli

As already discussed, the new Paoli Hotel was built to replace the old Paoli Inn as the passenger stop and restaurant for Philadelphia & Columbia passengers beginning in 1846. The Hotel continued to serve this purpose until soon after the Pennsylvania Railroad purchased the Main Line of Public Works in 1857, when "the station was relocated to a small frame building south of the Hotel."¹⁰ Though we have no

explicit maps, we believe this small frame enclosure operated by the PRR in Paoli would have stood approximately at today's intersection of North Valley Road and Paoli Plaza. The small structure continued in that function for some two decades until 1877 when the completion of track realignment through Paoli rendered its location obsolete by some 200 feet.

The exact location of a Paoli passenger station during the next six years after the realignment is again murky. The 1881 *Atlas of Bryn Mawr and Vicinity - Properties Along the Pennsylvania R.R. ... from City Line to Malvern Station* shows a new site for a Paoli station just west of the grade-level crossing