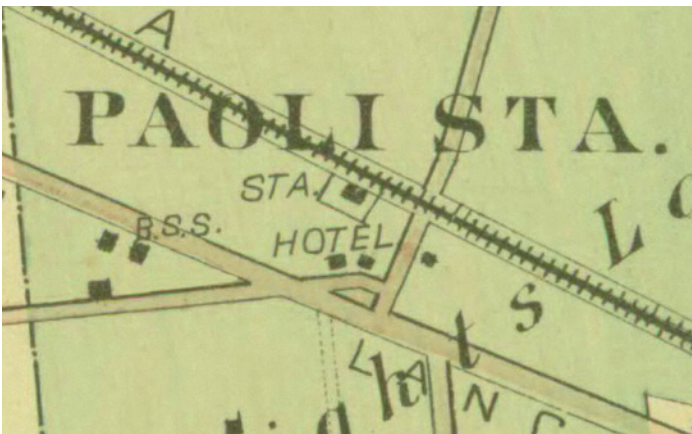


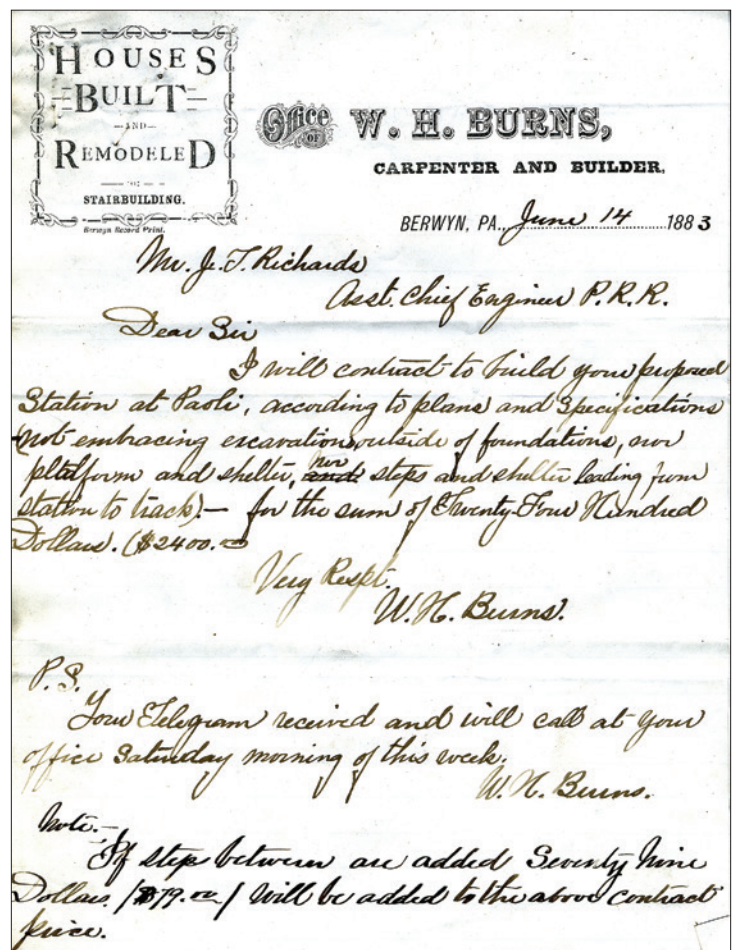
Looking northwest from Lancaster Ave. toward the Pennsylvania Railroad passenger station in Paoli, c. 1925. Immediately west of the station is the square newsstand, cited as the location of an earlier station serving Paoli. Image courtesy of the Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society.



From the *Atlas of Bryn Mawr and Vicinity - Properties Along the Pennsylvania Railroad. ... from City Line to Malvern Station*, 1881 (published by G. M. Hopkins), the passenger station at Paoli has assumed a new location adjacent to the recent track realignment on the southside, and immediately west, of the Chester Valley Road.

of what was then called the Chester Valley Road as it crossed the PRR tracks. Looking at the map, immediately south of that station—identified on the map as “STA.”—and below the word “HOTEL,” one sees the Paoli Hotel on the right, and the John D. Evans Summer Boarding House on the left. We have no images of this new station at that location. The Pennsylvania Railroad systemically acted with frugality by moving existing but underused buildings to new locations rather than authorizing new construction. It is probable that the small frame station built about 1857 would have been relocated to the south side of the realignment soon after the tracks were opened in 1877.

Additionally, there were two other Paoli station sites prior to the erection of the elegant Victorian-era station during the latter-half of 1883. A *Daily Local News* article from 1928 entitled “Years Change Paoli Station” makes a rather enigmatic statement regarding the period circa 1880: “During these years the station was moved to the east side of Valley road and occupied a small building near where the newsstand now is.” In other words, some 30–40 feet east of Valley Road. One might deduce that the structure moved to the east side of the Chester Valley Road was again the previous station located once more from the west side of the road. But, to complicate matters, in a short clipping from the March 17, 1882 *Daily Local News* is found the following



With this letter of response to the PRR's Assistant Chief Engineer, dated June 14, 1883, well-known Berwyn contractor William H. Burns transmits his proposal to build a station in Paoli for \$2,400. Burns, who would build sixteen railroad stations including Berwyn the previous year, was the chosen bidder, and turned the completed station to the railroad in January 1884. Courtesy of Hagley Library.



One of three “1890 photos” donated to the Society is this portrait of the Paoli passenger station, believed to taken in December, 1890. This station building was constructed by well-known Berwyn contractor William H. Burns during the latter half of 1883, and opened on January 21, 1884. Note the Paoli signboard at the roofline above the stairway. To the left of “PAOLI” it reads “To Philadelphia 19 miles” and to the right “To Pittsburgh 333 miles.” Next to the station, to the east (on the left side), stands a small cottage that was the office of the Supervisor of the Eastern Division of the PRR. The office burned to the ground two months later on February 4, 1891 but was immediately rebuilt. West of the station (to the right) is the original newsstand. Notice the double oil lamp in the right foreground, the single lantern standing in front of the newsstand, and the small step-ladders propped against each to facilitate the lamplighter’s task. The photographer is unknown. *Image courtesy of Ann Seybert, as received by her grandfather Roy Jones.*



An extreme close-up of the above image of the “new” Paoli station, believed taken in December 1890, shows off so many of the exquisite finishing details as specified by the Company: the decorative knee braces artistically connecting vertical and horizontal elements; the fretwork placed under the twin windows; the decorative muntins built into the window design, and the use of the newly introduced three-color PRR paint scheme.

announcement: “The Pennsylvania Railroad Company have removed an old station house at Parkesburg, and are re-erecting it at Paoli.” We may never know the explicit details of this move.

On July 29, 1881 a brief notice in the *Daily Local News* declares that “Daniel D. Hedley, William Smedley and John Kennedy, Jr., who recently purchased the John D. Evans farm, at Paoli, are now organizing a stock company ... The name of the company is the Paoli Heights Land Company.” Almost exactly one year later, on July 12, 1882, the *Daily Local News* records that “The Paoli Heights Improvement Company have given the Pennsylvania Railroad Company a tract of land, on the east side

of the bridge at Paoli, in consideration of which the railroad company is to build a station that will cost no less than \$4,000. Work on this building will commence soon.”

Eleven months later, in June 1883, the PRR awarded prominent Berwyn contractor William Burns the contract to build a new frame station in Paoli “at a short distance east of the bridge and also east of the old station [emphasis added].” On January 21, 1884, Burns’ new station at Paoli, which would stand for the next 69 years until 1953, “was occupied by the Company on Monday morning last.”



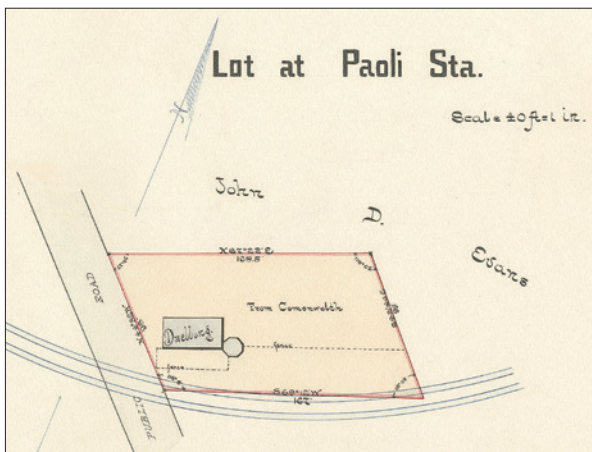
Assuredly the best-known of the official photographers of the Pennsylvania Railroad during the 19th century was William H. Rau. In September 1891, while on his first “campaign” to officially document the route of the PRR, Rau stopped at Paoli to capture this masterful photograph of the station and its environs. Looking east from the shadow of the Valley Road bridge, one immediately notices that the PRR is still running a three-track main line into Paoli. It would be another two years before the “cut” was again widened to allow a fourth track to be laid on the southside of the right-of-way. On the left, one can see a portion of the westbound passenger shelter and opposite that, across the tracks, what we believe to be a freight platform initially constructed for the transportation of fresh agricultural and dairy products into Philadelphia. Of particular interest is the the small office building (with awnings, immediately east of the station) used by Joseph Baker, Jr., Supervisor of the Eastern Division of the PRR. His previous office had burned to the ground seven months before, on the night of February 4, 1891, but had, with slight modifications, been fully rebuilt. *Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia.*

2. The Canal Collector’s Office

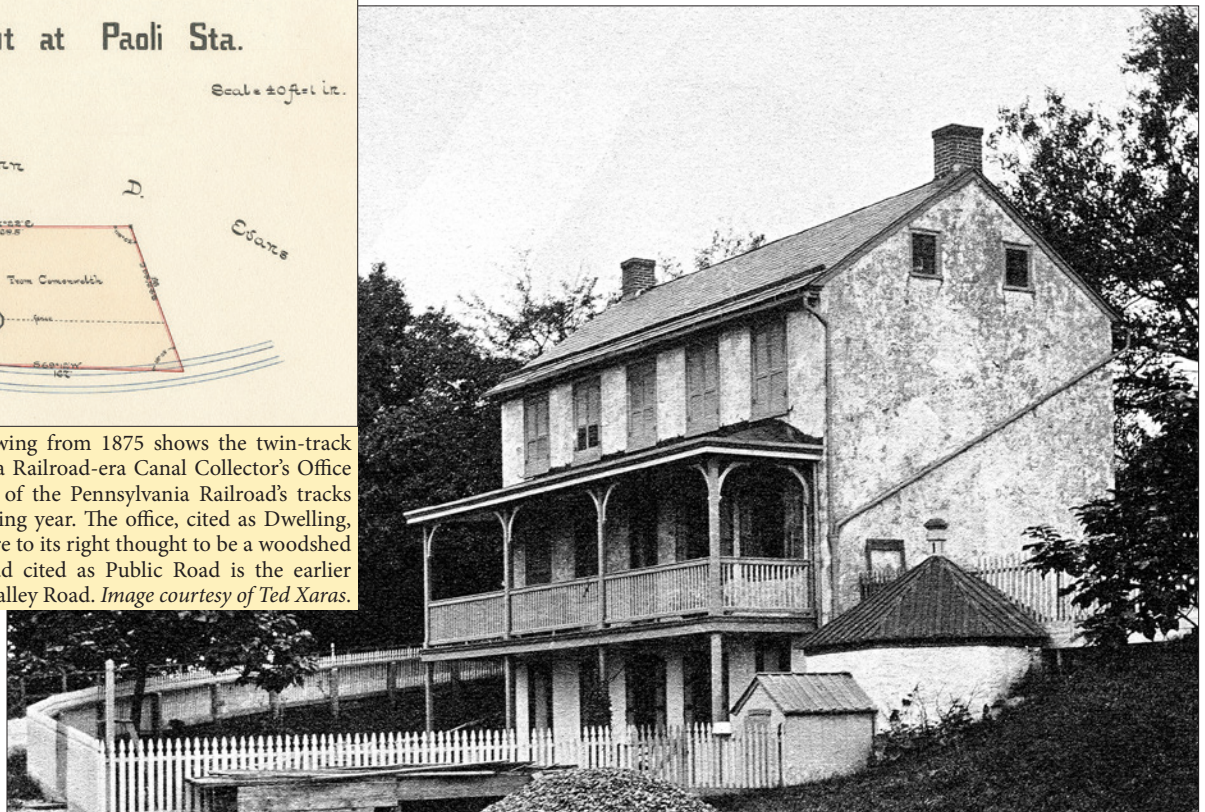
The Columbia Railroad was a part of Pennsylvania’s Canal Commission, and was initially perceived by the Commonwealth as little different from any other turnpike. Anyone could use the rails so long as they paid the wheel tax. The headquarters of the railroad’s first toll collector west of Philadelphia, referred to as the “Canal Collector’s Office,” was located in Paoli. The imposing three-story building stood directly north of the C&P tracks as they curved through Paoli. The Office stood just south of the current Paoli station in what is now a parking lot. We learn from the writings of historian Julius Sachse that at a meeting of the Canal Commissioners held in Harrisburg on March 12, 1834, “Enoch Davis was unanimously appointed collector upon the Columbia railway at the Paoli.” His duties were simply described: “as soon as weigh scales are completed at his office, he perform the duties of weigh master, and weigh all burden (freight) cars using said railway.”

From the first official “Rates of Toll” published in 1834, we learn that for users of the new railroad, the charges to carry passengers was two cents per passenger car per mile, plus one cent per passenger (over 12 years) per mile. For freight haulage, the charge per “burden car” was one cent per mile, plus all freight was additionally charged at between five mills and two cents per mile per 1000 pounds. Mr. Davis, Paoli’s first Collector, remained at his task for two years, during which time he is reported to have collected tolls and fines amounting to \$16,454.73.¹¹

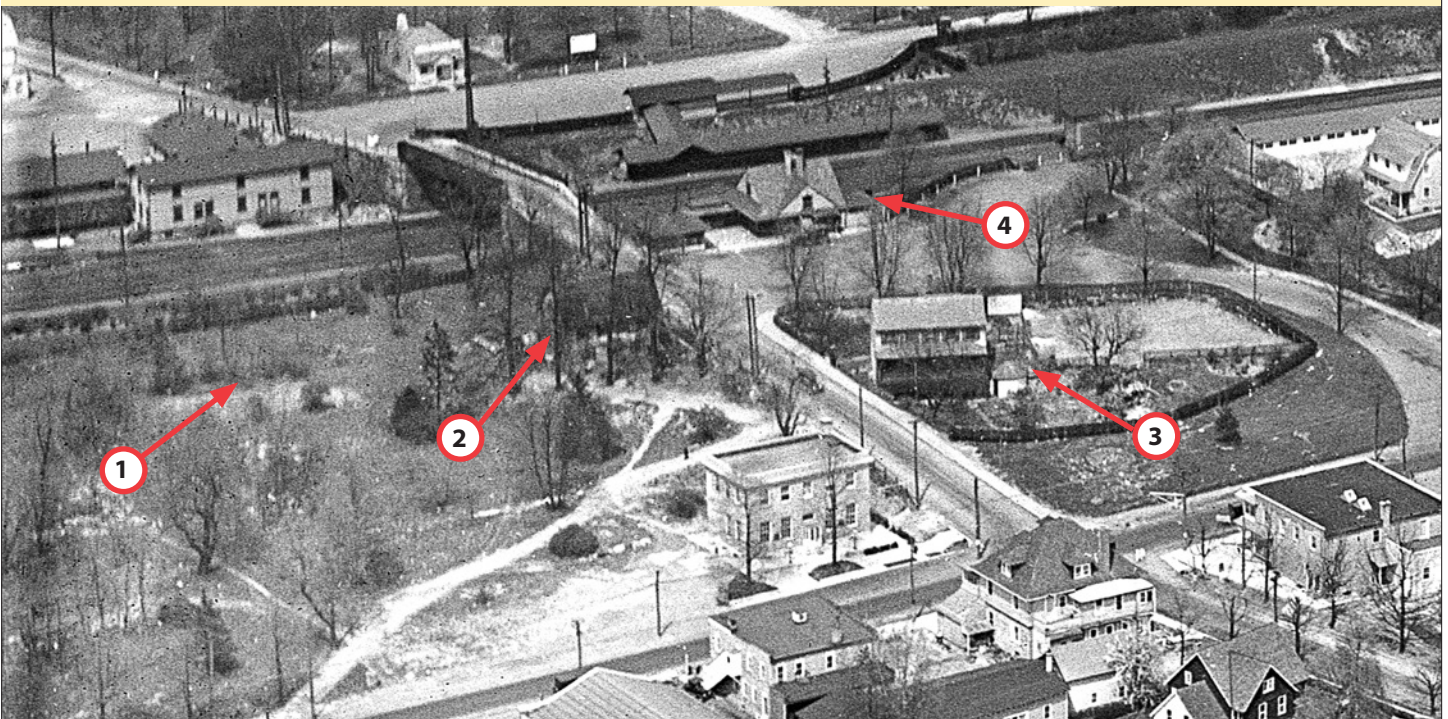
After the sale of the Public Works to the PRR in 1857, the structure seems to have been retained as an asset of the Pennsylvania Railroad for use as a non-railroad lease property into the early 1950s. But with the razing of the Victorian-era station in 1953 to make way for a “modern” structure, the “Canal Collector’s Office” was also torn down to make room for the increasing need of commuter parking.



This extremely rare drawing from 1875 shows the twin-track position of the Columbia Railroad-era Canal Collector's Office before the straightening of the Pennsylvania Railroad's tracks through Paoli the following year. The office, cited as Dwelling, has an octagonal structure to its right thought to be a woodshed or springhouse. The road cited as Public Road is the earlier configuration of North Valley Road. *Image courtesy of Ted Xaras.*



This rare photograph of the former Canal Collector's Office in Paoli was taken by local historian Julius Sachse c.1887-88. Over a decade had elapsed since the original C&P twin-track alignment, which had formerly curved around in front of the structure, to the left of the picket fence, had been relocated northward to its present position. The white octagonal structure is easily identified immediately beside the main structure. A viewer's sharp eye will identify a protective railing along the ascending Chester Valley Road as it rises to cross over the railroad bridge before descending into the Great Valley. *Image courtesy of the Herb and Barbara Fry Collection.*



This highly-cropped image of Paoli, taken by the Dallin Aerial Survey Co. in 1926, looks north across the Lincoln Highway (foreground) as it intersects with Valley Road. The photograph is remarkable on many accounts, and particularly at four spots designated by arrows: **Arrow #1)** The likely site of the former original Paoli Inn, still desolate 27 years after the devastating fire of 1899. **Arrow #2)** The somewhat-obscured structure lying just west of North Valley Road and south of the PRR trackage is believed to be the former Paoli Hotel, built in 1846 primarily to provide meals for the significantly increased number of railroad passengers, as the trains stopped for fuel and water. **Arrow #3)** The former Columbia Railroad-era Canal Collector's Office, built in 1834, with its adjacent octagonal structure. Interestingly, the picket fence line which curves in front of the structure (separating the structure from the Lincoln Highway) still perfectly mirrors the original curvature of the twin P&C tracks prior to the PRR's realignment in 1876-77. **Arrow #4)** During the realignment through the center of Paoli, a cut had reduced the natural elevation by some 28 feet in depth. Thus, the beautiful passenger station opened by the PRR in January 1884 appears perched high above track-level, and the topography declines gradually south towards the Highway. *Image courtesy of Hagley Museum & Library.*

3. The Mysterious Valley Road Bridge

As rail traffic along the PRR Main Line west from Philadelphia markedly increased in the late 1870s and into the 1880s, the always unforgiving grade-level crossings became all the more dangerous. A survey of prominent Chester County newspapers from this period show an increasing incidence of fatalities to both horses and passengers in the predictable outcome of a mishap with a passing train. Though a concerted effort to eliminate grade-level crossings across the system was not to be effected until the PRR presidency of A. J. Cassatt (1899–1906), this effort began in earnest along the Philadelphia Main Line beginning in the 1870s.

A brief article in West Chester's *Daily Local News*, dated August 5, 1878, seems to demonstrate the PRR's propensity for frugality as they sought to eliminate these at-grade crossings:

“NOT GRANTED. – Messrs. Charles Downing, Wm. Kirk, and Enos McCaughey, of Downingtown, appointed at the last Court, to review a road crossing the Pennsylvania Railroad, in Tredyffrin township, met on Saturday last, and after a hearing, refused to grant the request of the petitioners. The road was asked for by the Pennsylvania Railroad to save them from building two bridges over their road;” [emphasis added; the PRR was proposing that] “the new one would run between the two old roads, and be placed under the railroad instead of over it.”

These two at-grade road crossings are both believed to be within Paoli: at Bear Hill Road (today's Route 252), and at Chester Valley Road (today's North Valley Road). The Chester County Court's rejection would start the planning for the later construction of the first Valley Road bridge.

Railroad bridge construction along the PRR's lines was generally well-publicized, both in the Company's annual Maintenance-of-Way Reports (and other company-sponsored publications), and especially in various local newspapers. Scores of then-contemporary newspaper articles explain and validate the need for, and construction of, railroad bridges or viaducts along the Main Line from Overbrook to Green Tree. Yet mysteriously, no corporate, governmental or community documents have been uncovered which detail the planning and construction of “Overgrade Bridge No. 19.86,”¹² the iconic Paoli bridge which today carries North Valley Road from Lancaster Avenue over the railroad tracks in Paoli and north into the Great Valley.

PRR historian Al Giannantonio has suggested that the absence of any official PRR references to the “Valley Road bridge” construction might indicate the possibility that the bridge was built by Chester County rather than by the PRR. But considering the increasing role of Paoli within the Pennsylvania Railroad's Philadelphia Division by the early 1880s, we both agree that this likelihood, while possible, would be quite unusual indeed. There is no evidence of County involvement ... but even if Chester County rather than the PRR had built the bridge in Paoli, the absence of any local newspaper coverage on the construction of this bridge leaves us puzzled.

The very first reference of any sort to the “Valley Road bridge” in Paoli is found in the *Daily Local News* dated July 12, 1882:

“New Station at Paoli: The Paoli Heights Improvement Company have given the Pennsylvania Railroad Company a tract of land, on the east side of the bridge at Paoli



One of the pair of massive stone abutments supporting Paoli's Valley Road bridge, photographed in 2019. The solid construction is of the PRR style, “meant to last 500 years.” Such circumstantial evidence more than suggests the involvement of the Pennsylvania Railroad. *Courtesy of Roger D. Thorne.*

[emphasis added], in consideration of which the railroad company is to build a station that will cost no less than \$4,000. Work on this building will commence soon.”

Which leads to a letter from almost 50 years after the above-cited newspaper article, written by a well-known Paoli businessman named Utley Wedge. Wedge had considerable land holdings in and around Paoli, including the Paoli National Bank Building located immediately south of the bridge at the northwest corner of today's intersection of North Valley Road at Lancaster Avenue. On October 20th, 1930, Mr. Wedge writes to his friend, local physician Dr. A. W. Baugh:

“Dear Dr. Baugh;

The Penna Railroad acquired by condemnation proceedings the land on which their four track road runs through Paoli in October, 1880 from John D. Evans.

They acquired the land on which their station now stands, from the Paoli Heights Land Co. by purchase July 5th, 1882.

This seems to confirm my statement to you that the Penna. R.R. build the present bridge over their tracks not earlier than 1882. [emphasis added]

The curb put in by the Penna. R.R. was no doubt put in an established position, and the fence on the West side of Valley Road opposite the house on my property has been there ever since I have known Paoli. The distance from the Penna. R. R. fence to my fence is 50 feet four inches.

If you run across some old resident who remembers distinctly about the building of the present bridge and present road I should like to meet with him.”

We have no record of any response from Dr. Baugh, but Mr. Wedge's very precise statement about the bridge-building—the brief *Daily Local News* article cited above from July 12, 1882—and a statement by legendary railroad engineer William Hasell

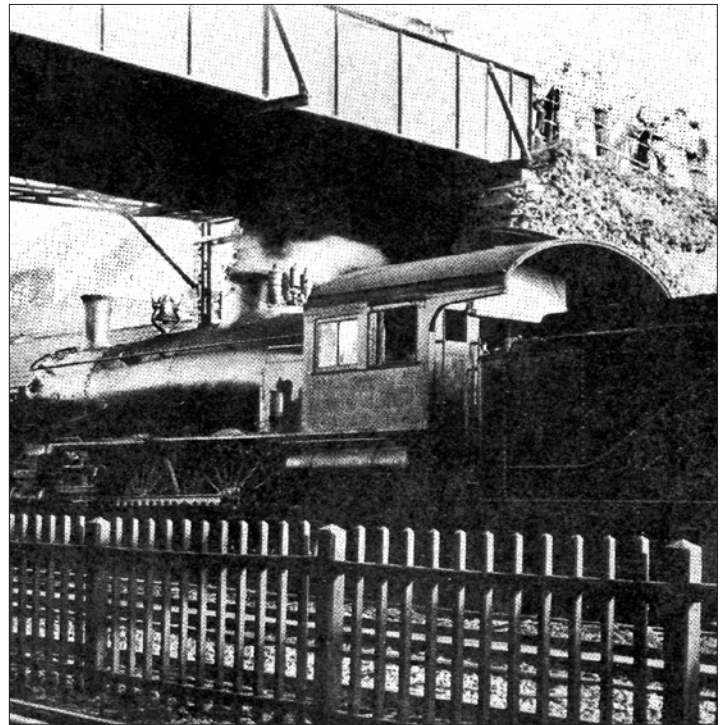
Wilson that the PRR suspended the construction of masonry structures in the winter¹³, provides circumstantial evidence to support the inference of a bridge-building in the spring of 1882.

Further, a detailed reference to the “Valley Road bridge” was found in an excellent article entitled “‘The Route Of The Paoli Local,’ The Main Line From Overbrook To Paoli,”¹⁴ written in 1997 by attorney and PRR historian James J. D. Lynch, Jr.. Of this Paoli bridge, he states emphatically:

“The first bridge carrying Valley Road (O.G. Br.19.86) over the Main Line was erected in 1882 (a later Valley Road Bridge was built in 1902 using the 1882 abutments, but this too has been replaced in recent years).”

iron plate girder bridge—exactly as stated by James Lynch in his 1997 article. The context of this photograph is the aftermath of a tragic crash in which the PRR’s crack *New York Limited Express* from St. Louis crashed into a stationary suburban local in front of the Paoli station. The last car attached to that local was the personal rail coach of W. W. Atterbury, the PRR’s General Manager - Lines East. Though Atterbury was not on his coach that tragic day, the crash killed five of his senior leaders and injured many other prominent PRR employees aboard the car.

These pictorial discoveries led to a quest to identify the exact types of bridges erected in Paoli, and perhaps even to conjure the bridge builders.



(LEFT) A portion of the only known photograph of the “Lattice Girder” bridge carrying what was then called the Chester Valley Road across the Main Line, taken between 1885–92. The “new” PRR station in Paoli, opened in January 1884, is shown east of the bridge. *Image courtesy of Ann Seybert, as received by her grandfather Roy Jones.* (RIGHT) An image from a similar perspective, taken September 28, 1905, clearly shows a PRR 4-4-2 Class E-2 locomotive sitting beneath a far more substantial iron riveted “Through Plate Girder” overpass bridge resting upon the original 1882 abutments. *Image courtesy of the Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society.*

Regrettably Mr. Lynch provided no explicit citations supporting his stated 1882 erection year, and his untimely death several years later makes further questioning impossible.

In December 2018, the Society was gifted with three spectacular photographs taken in Paoli, purportedly in the year 1890, and each with a Paoli railroad theme. One of these images shows the original Valley Road bridge, the only such photograph known to exist. The image, in addition to showing the bridge, includes the “new” PRR passenger station, opened for business in 1884, as seen beneath the bridge to the east. Coupled with the absence of a fourth Main Line track through Paoli, which was not completed until 1893, the photograph dates itself within a nine-year range between 1884 and 1893.

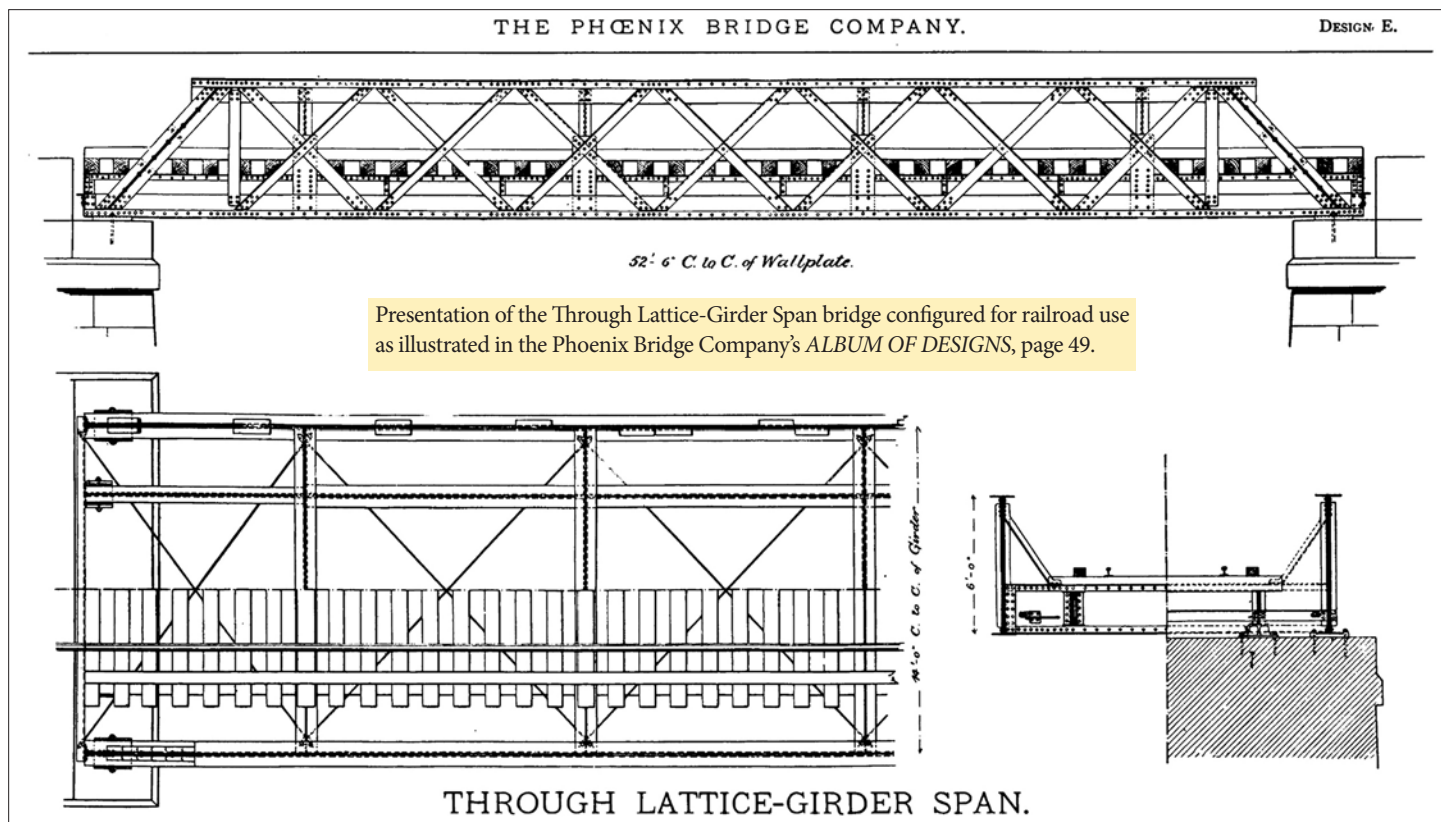
A second photograph in the Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society collection is dated September 29, 1905, and was taken from an almost identical perspective as the first. The scene shows a steam locomotive sitting under the Valley Road bridge, but clearly the bridge is very different. The original “1882” bridge has here been replaced with a heavier, more utilitarian

There is an excellent website—**HistoricBridges.org**—authored by Nathan Holth, which offers expert information and photo-documentation for many types of historic bridges in the U.S.A. and abroad. I contacted Mr. Holth, explained my quest going back to 19th-century Paoli, and sought his guidance as to the style of the early bridge shown in the photograph. He was enthusiastically helpful, explaining that this first structure was of a European-style that he finds extremely rare in the United States. Technically it is called a “Through Lattice Girder” bridge. The replacement is far more common, a “Riveted Through Plate Girder” bridge of a type widely built in the early 20th century. In fact, the 1918 PRR Valuation Map v02.1.PA-15 provides an official nomenclature for the Paoli bridge as “OG [i.e., over grade] Br. No. 19.86 - 1/2 Thru Plate Girder.”

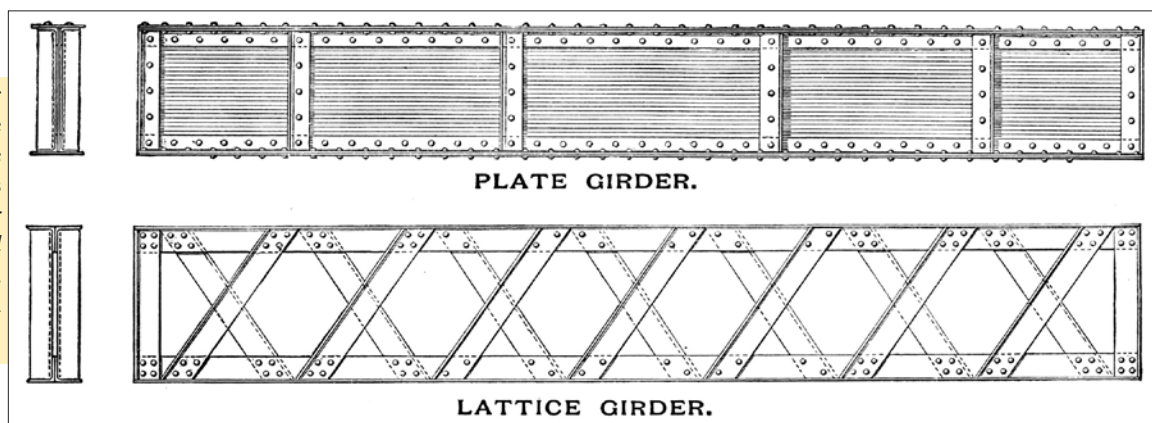
Having identified the style of both the first and second Paoli bridges, Mr. Holth next speculated on which American bridge maker might have designed and constructed the first structure. We specifically considered the Phoenix Bridge Company, located just 10 short miles north from Paoli in Phoenixville.

The Phoenix Bridge Co. was created in 1864 as a division of the already highly successful Phoenix Iron Company. From 1869 to 1884, the company fabricated more than 800 bridges. Railroads were their biggest customers, with the Pennsylvania Railroad and the Philadelphia & Reading Railroad being two of their largest clients. The Phoenix Bridge Co. also fabricated over 280 highway bridges during the 1880s-90s, although Mr. Holth stated that Phoenix Bridge would generally have encouraged a Warren truss design for short spans like the gap in Paoli. Two documents (below) from the Phoenix Bridge Company's fabrication inventory provide further illustration of a Lattice Girder span.

Regrettably, for the present, documentation on the details of the "1882 lattice-girder bridge" remain elusive, including who ordered the span, who paid for it, and who fabricated and constructed that first bridge in Paoli. And even today, as railroad historian Frank Tatnall explained, "the Paoli span is a so-called 'orphan bridge' for which the railroad claims no maintenance responsibility. Often in such cases the local governmental entities also disavow such responsibility, although PennDOT and Amtrak have expressed a joint intent to replace the current bridge as part of Phase II of the Paoli Transportation Center project.



Comparison of Plate Girder vs. Lattice Girder bridge styles as illustrated in the Phoenix Bridge Company's *Useful Information For Architects, Engineers, And Workers In Wrought Iron*, Phoenixville, Pa. Revised Edition, 1886, p. 89.



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