



This extraordinary photograph, believed taken in 1890, shows the first railroad signal tower in Paoli. The exact erection date of the tower is unknown, but was believed to be soon after the completion of the track realignment in August 1877. A “Through Lattice Girder Span” bridge over the three-track PRR right-of-way was constructed atop massive quarried stone abutments just east of the tower in 1882 to replace the increasingly hazardous grade-level crossing. This wooden tower would serve the needs of the Paoli interlocking until its replacement by the 1896 brick tower. According to the Pennsylvania Railroad Company’s *Special Instructions to Telegraph Operators and Linemen*, the telegraph signal “PA” shown on the tower was assigned “prior to July 1, 1884.” Image courtesy of Ann Seybert, as received by her grandfather Roy Jones.

4. The First Paoli Signal Tower

A “new 69-lever ‘PA’ Tower” was opened for operation at Paoli on March 15, 1896.¹⁵ Almost a century and a quarter later, that brick switch tower, which today continues to stand 430 feet west of the Valley Road bridge on the north side of the tracks, serves the needs of Amtrak and SEPTA in controlling the Paoli interlocking.

But some two decades before the construction of that current brick tower, the Pennsylvania Railroad had constructed a wooden signal tower in Paoli on the south side of the tracks, immediately west of the then-grade-level crossing of the Chester Valley Road. And the authors have yet to speak to anyone who previously knew of its existence.

So what can we learn from this image? When the initial two-track realignment was completed between Eagle and Green Tree on the Philadelphia Division in August 1877, the breakthrough had opened a straightened right-of-way that would eventually accommodate four tracks. By the end of 1877, a third track between Berwyn and Malvern had joined the two realigned tracks laid in August.¹⁶ The middle track now tended to be used as a “passing siding,” increasing the road’s efficiency by allowing faster, high priority trains to pass slower or lower

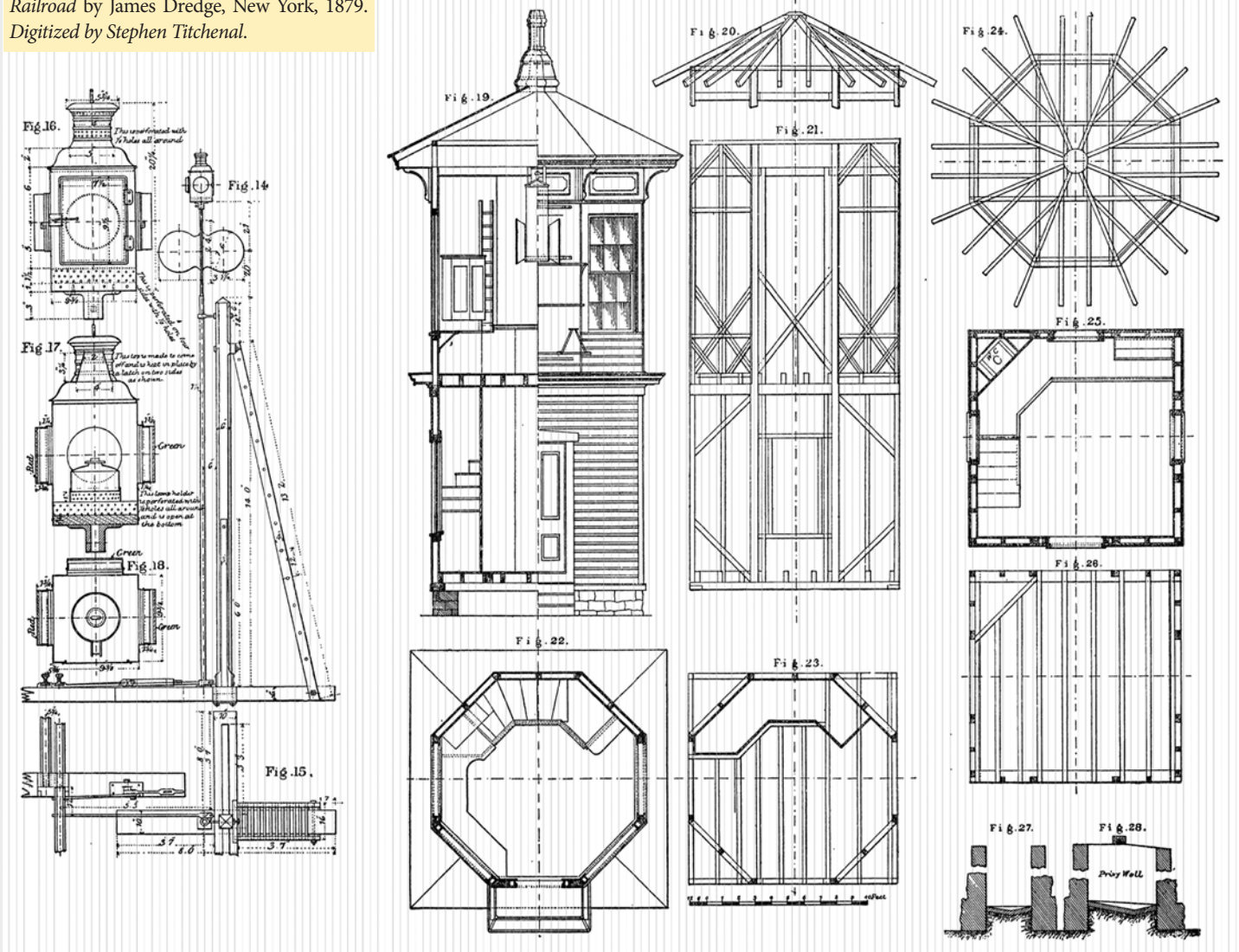
priority trains going in either direction. Once that new right-of-way was created, a wide grade-level crossing of the three tracks was created to carry the Chester Valley Road. Already dangerous in the old two-track P&C track configuration, the hazards to pedestrians and horse-drawn vehicles on the new three-track crossing had become even more acute as more rail traffic passed through Paoli, and train speeds increased because the curves were gone. Gratefully, the lattice girder bridge replaced the dangerous at-grade crossing of the Chester Valley Road in 1882.

A support structure close to the tower holds twin semaphore signals (with their horizontal blades signifying “stop”) that appear to be of 1870s vintage, but the photograph of the Paoli signal tower was clearly taken later. The final clue in helping to date this image is the “new” Paoli station, seen east under the bridge, which was placed into use in January 1884. A fourth track through Paoli did not arrive until 1893, so the date range of this image is between 1884 and 1893. The donor’s grandfather believed the image had been taken “around 1890.” Research will continue in detailing this signal tower.

The Paoli signal tower was of a well-known design. Railroad historian Ted Xaras explained how the PRR built these pre-

Plate III, Section II of *The Pennsylvania Railroad* by James Dredge, New York, 1879.
Digitized by Stephen Titchenal.

SIGNALS AND SIGNAL TOWER.



fabricated towers in their carriage shops in Altoona, Pennsylvania. They all had a similar construction, and hundreds were easily erected on-site throughout the system. The tower itself is described as “a light-framed timber structure about 12 ft. square, and 15 ft. from the ground level to the upper floor in which the operator sits, and which contains the requisite telegraph and other signaling apparatus. From the level of the first floor, the tower is made octagonal ... of ornamental design.”¹⁷ From the 1½ ft. high stone base to the top of the tower, with its 4-ft. octagonal-shaped pitched roof, and a 5-ft. smoke jack, the structure rose 37½ ft. from the ground.

A melded pair of images from the same perspective, comprising the c.1890 photograph of the first signal tower, and a 2018 image taken during the construction of the Paoli Transportation Center, provides a ghostly look into the past. *Courtesy of Roger D. Thorne.*



5. The Paoli Freight House

The last of the “1890 photographs” received in 2018 by the Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society is a previously unknown image of the Paoli Freight House located on the north side of the realigned Main Line right-of-way, at the extreme east side of the PRR rail yard immediately west of the Valley Road bridge as the road begins its descent north into the Great Valley. On the right of the image one can see the railings along either side of North Valley Road. We have yet to certify its date of construction, but because freight houses take hard abuse, and this structure appears to be in almost mint condition, we agree that it was established no earlier than the late 1880s.

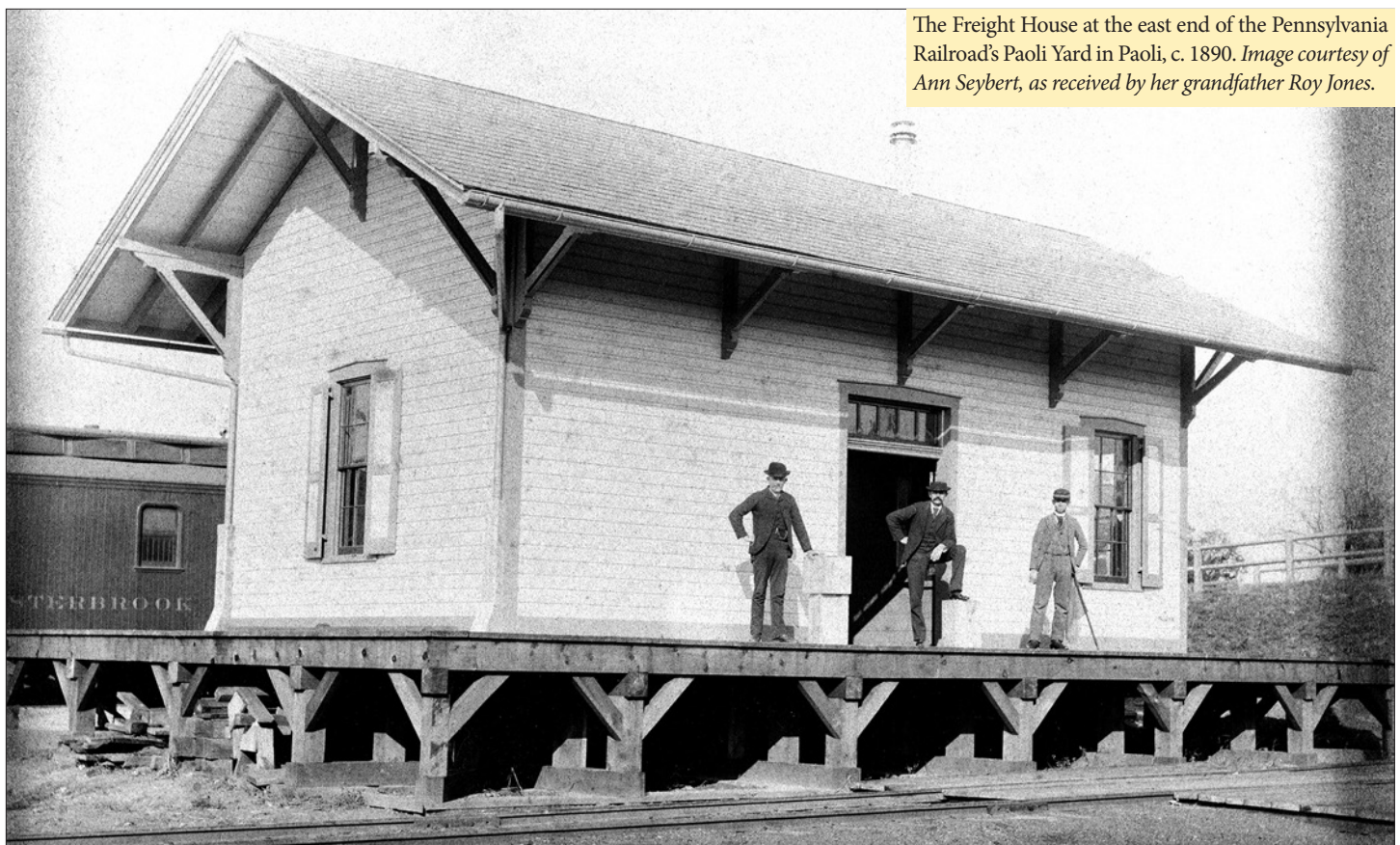
I sent this image to rail historian Ted Xaras, who responded with an unexpected perspective—which is often his way. Ted is a professional artist, and colors and textures are his “meat and drink.” He stated that this photo shows that the “new” PRR standard paint scheme for structures had already become implemented by this time. This PRR paint scheme relied on variations of a color called *Raw Umber*, a dark, slightly “cool” brown. By adding formulaic quantities of white paint with the Raw Umber, the PRR created *Light Umber* for use as a structure’s base shade; and *Dark Umber* for much of the structure’s trim. The umber variations were then complemented by a third color, *Dark Orange* (a hue closer in feel to Tuscan Red) for windows and sashes. This color scheme continued to be a standard on the line for wooden buildings, stations and many towers throughout the duration of the company’s life, and were only changed with the advent of the Penn Central in the late 1960s.

Also, of particular interest in this image is the railcar, in its deep, rich PRR shade known as Tuscan Red, which sits partially hidden behind the freight house. We see an abbreviated

“... STERBROOK” painted on the car. It is assuredly the car named CHESTERBROOK, named for Chesterbrook Farm, owned by A. J. Cassatt and located less than three miles north of Paoli in the Great Valley. The car, a converted baggage car used as Cassatt’s private “horse car” to carry his beloved thoroughbreds to shows, and made available to bring in breeding stock, was built by the PRR in its Altoona car shops.

In April 1881, forty-two-year-old Alexander J. Cassatt, then first vice-president of the Pennsylvania Railroad, had begun to piece together his Chesterbrook Farm, and to seriously pursue his passion for horse racing and horse breeding. Cassatt had purchased an old farm on Swedesford Road near Howellville, and by adding other properties had, within a few years, created an estate of more than 600 acres as a working stock farm. A racing stable had originally been A. J. Cassatt’s primary interest, but even after Cassatt gave up racing, the raising of pure-bred horses, cattle and sheep continued to be the principal activity of Chesterbrook Farm. And always, racehorse breeding, and the raising and breeding of hackney horses, remained his delight.

In September 1882, Cassatt had carried out his announced intention to retire from the railroad and become a “country squire.” But within a year of this “retirement,” he had rejoined the Board of Directors of the Pennsylvania Railroad. In 1885, he was named president of the proposed New York, Philadelphia and Norfolk Railroad; and by June 1899, at the age of 60, he was reluctantly persuaded to give up his life as a country gentleman and return to active management of the Pennsylvania Railroad as its president.¹⁸ He served brilliantly in that position until December 28, 1906 when, at 67, he died suddenly. Though he and his wife Lois had homes on Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia and in Haverford, Chesterbrook Farm had continued to retain a hold on their affections.



The Freight House at the east end of the Pennsylvania Railroad's Paoli Yard in Paoli, c. 1890. Image courtesy of Ann Seybert, as received by her grandfather Roy Jones.

6. Restoration of 19th-Century Paoli

In 1905, the Berwyn photographer Lucy Sampson captured an image of the westbound (from Philadelphia) shelter at Paoli built to protect passengers as they climbed the stairs up the embankment from the platform to await their carriages. At the time of Lucy's photograph, this shelter had already been standing for over 20 years since being built by contractor William H. Burns during his main station construction contract in 1883.

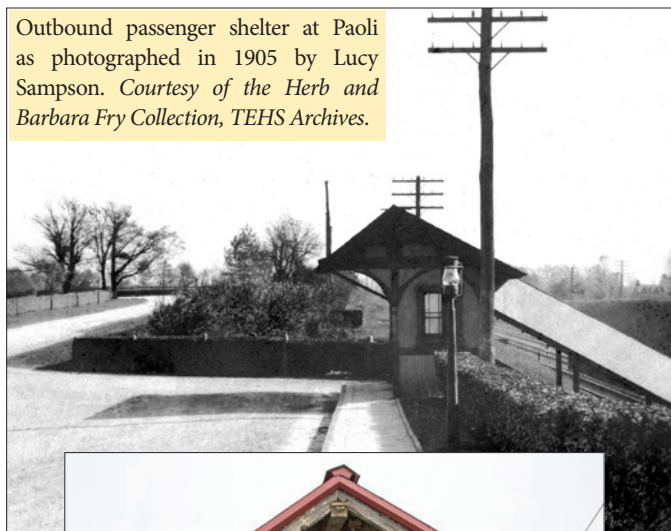
The Victorian-era Paoli station was razed and replaced in 1953. But the westbound platform, including its 1883 shelter, remained largely intact for over six more decades until preparations began for the massive Paoli Transportation Center in 2017. Would this 134-year-old shelter succumb to the same ignominious fate that befell the old eastbound station?

Fortunately, a more enlightened approach was in store.

The Paoli Transportation Center project was large and complicated, and involved coordination between entities including: SEPTA, Amtrak, PennDOT, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, Chester County, and Tredyffrin Township. The chosen architectural/engineering firm was Gannet Fleming of Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, and Neshaminy Constructors, Inc. of Feasterville served as the General Contractor.

In the fall of 2017, Neshaminy undertook the painstaking and laborious task of disassembling the Victorian-era shelter, delivering the carefully-numbered parts to a painting subcontractor for a much-needed stripping and priming of each, and then storing the vintage parts for almost two years until, in July of 2019, a partial reassembly was completed on the site to serve as a new bicycle canopy for use by commuters. The community should be much pleased with the preservation design of Gannet Fleming, and the meticulous restoration work completed by Neshaminy and by their subcontractor, Gracie Painting of Philadelphia.

Outbound passenger shelter at Paoli as photographed in 1905 by Lucy Sampson. *Courtesy of the Herb and Barbara Fry Collection, TEHS Archives.*



134-year-old outbound passenger shelter at Paoli station. *Photo taken on May 30, 2017, courtesy of Roger D. Thorne.*

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to especially acknowledge the special efforts of Cliff Parker, Stephen Titchenal, and Ted Xaras. Thank you all.
— Mike Bertram and Roger D. Thorne

Neshaminy carpenters (L to R) Mike Esposto, Jason Blackmon and Mike Magee carefully disassembled the Victorian-era shelter for numbering, surface preparation, lead remediation, and storage until the reconstruction could be completed. Almost two years later, the same team accomplished the meticulous rebuilding. *Photo taken on September 12, 2017, courtesy of Roger D. Thorne.*





Exactly 23 months after the physical disassembly of the Victorian-era passenger shelter, and only 40 days before the much-awaited dedication of the Paoli Transportation Center on September 23, 2019, the new structure rests in its new location — to be used as a bicycle canopy for commuters. Rebuilt mostly with the original timbers and knee braces of the old shelter which had been hand-crafted at William H. Burns' Planing Mill in Berwyn in 1883, the scene serves to well-juxtapose the Old and the New. *Courtesy of Roger D. Thorne.*

Notes

- 1 Abstracted from *The Wayside Inns on the Lancaster Roadside between Philadelphia and Lancaster*, by Julius Sachse, Second edition, 1912.
- 2 "YEARS CHANGE PAOLI STATION," *Daily Local News*, 1928. From the collection of C. Herbert Fry.
- 3 Sachse, op. cit.
- 4 The original Paoli Inn (as opposed to the Paoli Hotel) was increasingly referred to as the John D. Evans Summer Boarding House. See Witmer Chester County Atlas, Tredyffrin, 1873.
- 5 "YEARS CHANGE PAOLI STATION," op. cit.
- 6 In 1834 the Canal Commissioners chose for the site for its first railroad repair/maintenance shop in Pennsylvania the newly-laid-out town of Parkesburg in Chester County. The Parkesburg Shop grew substantially during the years of the Columbia Railroad, and was a major contributor to the local economy. After the sale of the Public Works to the PRR in 1857, the locomotive shops at Parkesburg actually expanded briefly. But it was not to last. By 1861 the Pennsylvania Railroad completely relocated all their shops to Harrisburg and eventually to Altoona. The loss of the shops at Parkesburg was devastating to the local employment and economy, and not soon forgotten in Chester County.
- 7 Shortly after selling his property to the Paoli Heights Land Company in the summer of 1881, John D. Evans purchased the once-grand Evenson property in Paoli (the former Jackson Inn was located on the Lancaster Turnpike at Chestnut Road). Major improvements were made during the spring of 1882, after which Evans lived in his now-elegant home until his death the following year.
- 8 Sachse, op. cit.
- 9 Created between 1903-06, the "duck-under track" allowed Paoli commuter trains coming from the coach yard to easily re-enter the eastbound No. 1 Main Line Track for service.
- 10 "YEARS CHANGE PAOLI STATION," op. cit.
- 11 Sachse, op. cit., p. 67.
- 12 Cited in the Pennsylvania Railroad's *Right of Way and Track Map V-2.1/15*, as prepared by the Office of Valuation Engineer on June 30, 1918.
- 13 "In making changes of the roadway subsequent to 1868, ... all mortar work was suspended during the winter season, to which practice I do not doubt that the good condition of the masonry was to some extent due." William Hasell Wilson (Maj. Wilson's son), *The Columbia-Philadelphia Railroad and its Successor*, 1896, p. 61.
- 14 Pennsylvania Railroad Technical & Historical Society, Philadelphia Chapter, *High Line*, V.16, N. 1, June 1997, p. 29.
- 15 Christopher T. Baer, *PRR CHRONOLOGY-1896*, June 2006 Edition, http://prrths.com/newprf_files/Hagley/PRR1896.pdf
- 16 Christopher T. Baer, *PRR CHRONOLOGY-1877*, June 2006 Ed., http://prrths.com/newprf_files/Hagley/PRR1877%20Jun%2006.pdf
- 17 James Dredge, *The Pennsylvania Railroad*, New York, 1879, p. 37.
- 18 Bob Goshorn, "A. J. Cassatt's Chesterbrook Farm," *Tredyffrin Easttown History Club Quarterly*, Berwyn, Pennsylvania, Vol. 19, No. 4, October 1981.