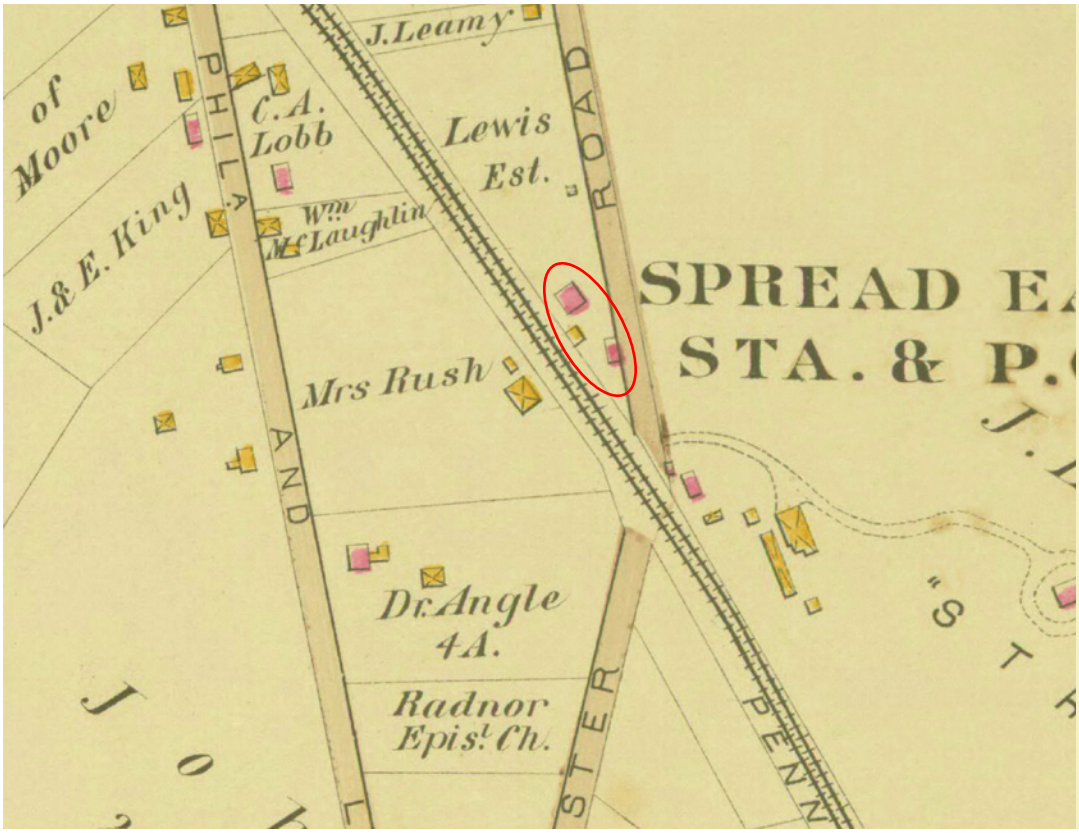
Excerpted from Vol. 56 No. 1 of the *Tredyffrin Easttown History Quarterly*



The Pennsylvania Railroad's Main Line diagonally bisects this atlas view of Eagle, c. 1881, with the Old Lancaster Road crossing the twin tracks diagonally at grade-level. Immediately north of the tracks, in the apex of the triangular property segment identified as "Lewis Est.", are three indicated structures: the largest (in red, symbolizing stone) is the former Eagle Hotel; the next (in yellow, symbolizing brick) is the Spread Eagle Station and Post Office; and the third, in red, is a long "shed" or warehouse along the road. The Wentworth estate, called "Strafford," is shown east of the Old Lancaster Road and north of the tracks, with the driveway to the mansion beginning just north of the crossing. From the *Atlas of Bryn Mawr and Vicinity, or of Properties Along the Pennsylvania R.R. including 1½ miles each side of the Road and from City Line to Malvern Station*. Published by G. M. Hopkins, 1881. *Courtesy of the Radnor Historical Society.*

On March 26, 1883, John Langdon Wentworth wrote a letter to the Pennsylvania Railroad's Chief Engineer, making a reasoned appeal to permanently close the dangerous grade-level crossing and create a safer alternative. Wentworth offered to sell some of his property for the creation of a viaduct under the tracks (in railroad speak, an "undergrade bridge") to carry Old Lancaster Road safely beneath the tracks, and he further agreed to personally pay the cost of re-routing the roadbed of Old Lancaster Road from its then-current path to connect the new viaduct. Thus began a decade-long negotiation with the Pennsylvania Railroad concerning the elimination of this hazardous crossing, not only on behalf of the Wentworth family, but—based upon correspondence—also on behalf of several of Wentworth's neighbors, including Mrs. Maria Rush, daughter of the late Mifflin Lewis.

An inter-office message from the Office of the Chief Engineer to the General Superintendent, dated March 28, 1883, shows that the response to Mr. Wentworth's request seemed to be favorable. "*This party* [Wentworth] *has finally succeeded in getting rid of the grade crossing at Eagle by having a new road laid out at our request to pass under the bridge at that place. I do not think he has asked any more than what is reasonable, for us to give him enough stone to make about 250 yds of the new road when they are ready for it we agreed to build the road across our own ground. … getting rid of this grade crossing will certainly fully pay for what it costs us.*" [24] Wentworth was paid $2,200 by the PRR for 1.414 acres of the estate's land for the undergrade bridge, and Wentworth's hopes were high that progress would come soon.

Several months later in 1883, when the third main line track became operational through Eagle, the PRR issued a prohibition of any further use of this grade-level crossing except for emergencies, and all carriage driving had to be diverted. It was reported that after the third track was laid, "*the grade (up to the crossing from the southeast) for fifty feet from the south rail is one foot in five and almost impracticable for traffic.*"

Then inexplicably, despite the hope for quick action by the railroad, there was in fact no action taken on the undergrade bridge for seven long years. [25]

On December 24, 1890, a PRR blueprint of the proposed "Eagle" undergrade bridge was created, and once again, hope freshened. But on May 5, 1892, after waiting another eighteen months after the completion of this blueprint, John Langdon Wentworth, ever tenacious, once again pleaded his case to the Pennsylvania Railroad Company's Chief Engineer … shared here in part:

"It is now about <u>ten years</u> since you wrote me that 'the examinations show that there is no trouble in making an undergrade bridge at Eagle'. Since that time I have been more than anxious to have the bridge, without which we cannot do anything towards the development of the valuable property, & the children who now own the Lewis property inform me that he would put it in good order and can get a tenant who will keep the house open all the year once a bridge is built."

"I have done everything in my power to facilitate this matter. You have bought the land, and I can see no good reason why the bridge should not be built this year … and thus save the great risk of life that is constantly incurred here, and as I fully believe is only prevented by the careful outlook help by the (signal) *tower man."*

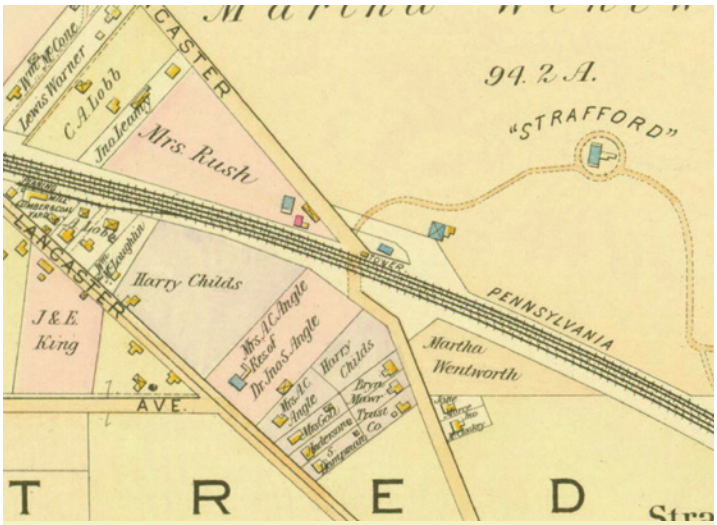
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Mr. Wentworth concludes:

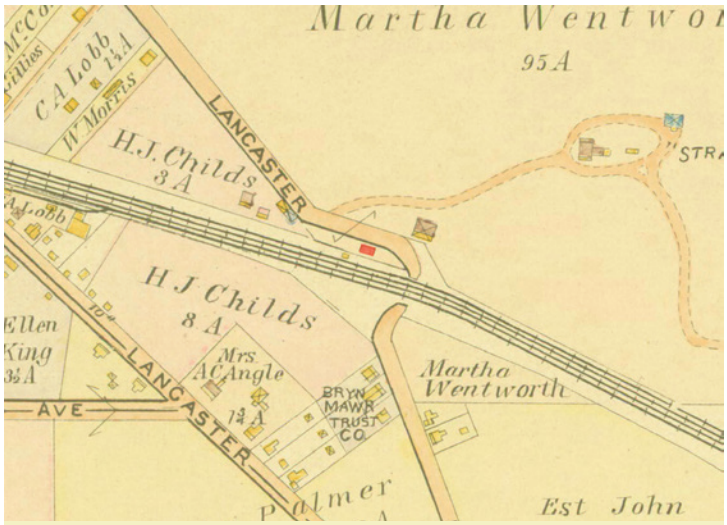
"If I was a younger man in better health I should have less anxiety, but when a man is in his 73rd year he does not have much time to wait, & a year becomes very long."

Sincerely trusting that my earnest appeal is heard." [25]

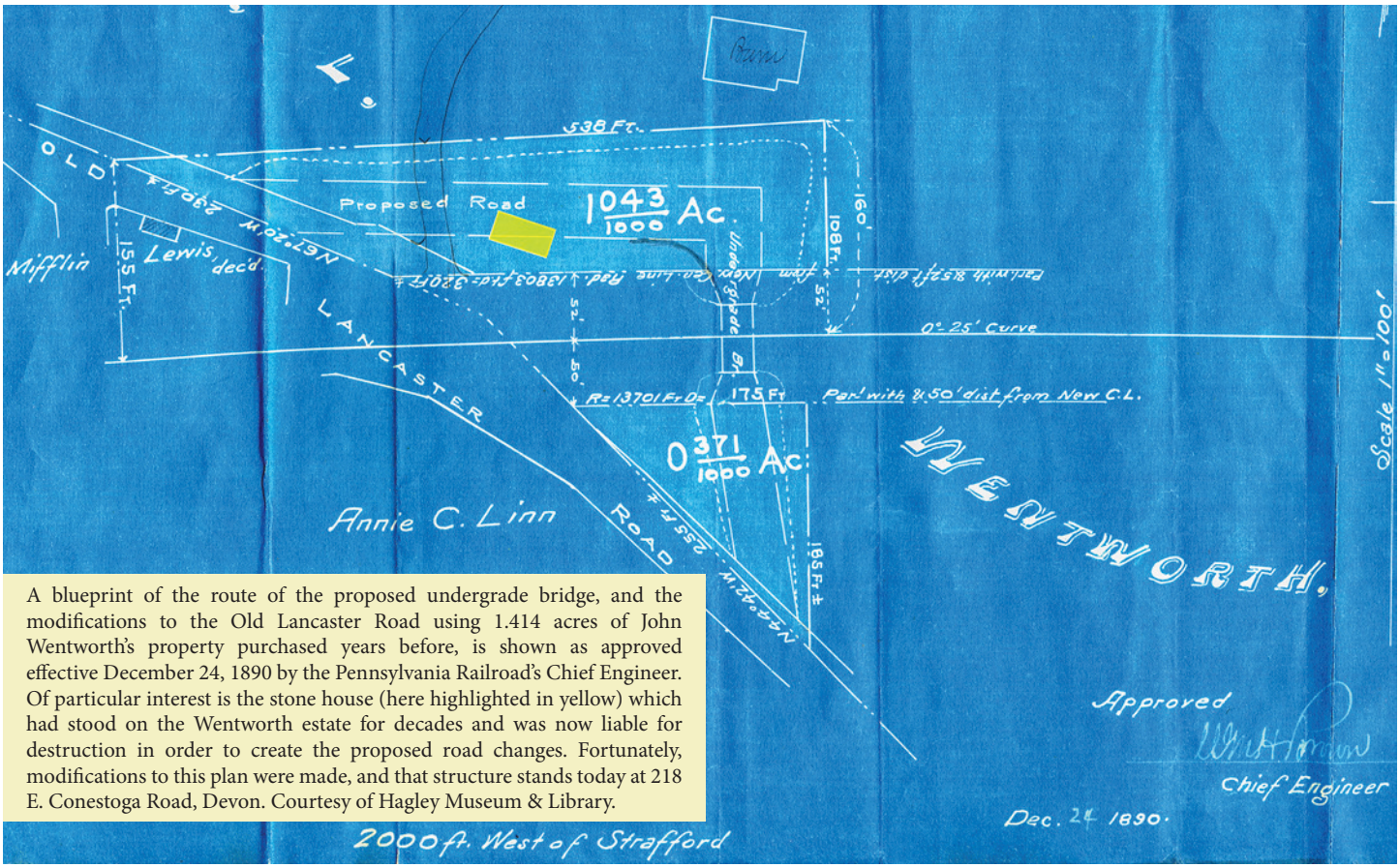
True to form, despite his articulate pleas and proffered help, assistance from the Pennsylvania Railroad continued only at glacial speed, and Mr. Wentworth never lived to see his long-awaited viaduct. Fortunately, the railway atlases of 1897 and 1900 provide the conclusion:



In this excerpt from the *Atlas of Suveys Along the Line of the Pennsylvania R.R. from Rosemont to Westchester, 1897*, published by A. H. Mueller, one can see that while the configuration of the at-grade crossing across the now-four-track right of way has changed slightly, there is still no undergrade bridge five years after Mr. Wentworth's appeal. The "Strafford" estate is now cited in Martha Wentworth's name, a probable indication that John Wentworth had died by 1897. Note the position of the small, blue rectangular structure in the middle of the image, adjacent to the TOWER. *Courtesy of Radnor Historical Society*.

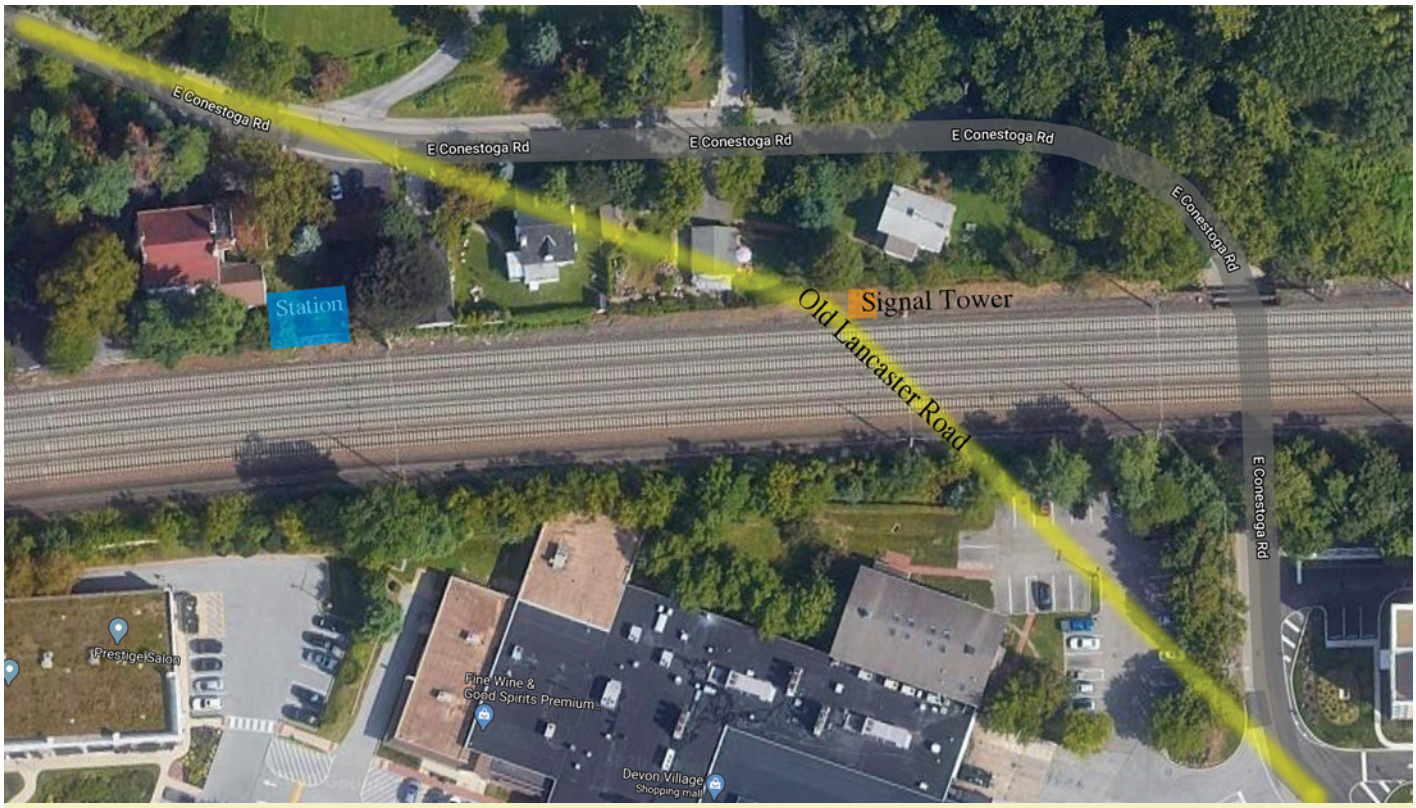


In this excerpt from the *Properties Along The Pennsylvania R.R. from Overbrook to Malvern, 1900*, published by J. L. Smith, the improved route of the undergrade bridge and Old Lancaster Road is now clearly visible. The triangular property on which the former Eagle Hotel stood, with ownership previously cited to Mifflin Lewis's daughter Maria Rush on the 1897 atlas, is now shown owned by Harry J. Childs. Note that the small rectangular structure, now colored red, sits on the west side of the road after this realignment. *Courtesy of Radnor Historical Society*.



A blueprint of the route of the proposed undergrade bridge, and the modifications to the Old Lancaster Road using 1.414 acres of John Wentworth's property purchased years before, is shown as approved effective December 24, 1890 by the Pennsylvania Railroad's Chief Engineer. Of particular interest is the stone house (here highlighted in yellow) which had stood on the Wentworth estate for decades and was now liable for destruction in order to create the proposed road changes. Fortunately, modifications to this plan were made, and that structure stands today at 218 E. Conestoga Road, Devon. Courtesy of Hagley Museum & Library.

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This image superimposes several characteristics of Eagle dating from 1887 (as seen in *Properties Along the Pennsylvania R.R. from Overbrook to Malvern Sta.*, published by J. L. Smith) upon a portion of contemporary Devon as seen in a 2020 Google Satellite View. For orientation, the black-roofed complex in the lower-center is the Devon Whole Foods supermarket. Today's East Conestoga Road diverges from the former route of Old Lancaster Road (yellow) at the lower-right next to today's Brightview Senior Living, then guides north through the undergrade bridge and soon rejoins the route of the old State Road near the former Eagle Hotel (red roof). Shown in blue is the exact site of the former PRR Eagle station; and farther east, shown in orange, the location of the Eagle "SZ" Signal Tower. The structure with the white roof adjacent to the former signal tower was formerly on the Wentworth estate before the realignment of Old Lancaster Road, and is today 218 E. Conestoga Road.



Looking southbound on an early summer morning in 2020 is the long-awaited undergrade bridge No. 15.79, built c. 1899. An extension of the viaduct on the south side of the bridge was added in 1917. This underpass, whose height is one of the lowest in American railroading, has been the bane of countless truck drivers who learn only too late that they cannot proceed … nor easily turn around. *Courtesy of Roger D. Thorne.*

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ENDNOTES

1 In 1917 the Pennsylvania Highway Department purchased the Philadelphia & Lancaster Turnpike and discontinued toll collection. The name of that road was changed to the Old Lancaster Road. However, other sections of road in the state were already known by that name. To avoid confusion, it was ordered that the use of the name Old Lancaster Road for other than the former Turnpike be changed. In the case of far eastern Tredyffrin Township, Old Lancaster Road was changed to East Conestoga Road.

2 Courtesy of the Chester County Archives & Record Services, West Chester, PA.

3 The documented absence of any permanent stone buildings upon these five building lots in November 1834 is fundamental to disprove subsequent claims that the structure which served as the Eagle Hotel had Colonial origins. Neither the article found in the Radnor Historical Society *Bulletin* by Emma C. Patterson entitled *The old Eagle railroad station – PRR*, and dated June 16, 1950, which purports that the "*large stone house* (was) *built in 1762*"; nor the crest containing the year 1763 which currently hangs above the front entrance of what is today 218 E. Conestoga Road, Devon, has any basis of fact.

4 *Ibid*.

5 *Ibid*.

6 General Joshua Evans, Jr. owned the Paoli Inn started by his father. His brother Randall Evans owned the competing General Jackson Inn.

7 Identified by Greg Prichard, Radnor Historical Society.

8 Herbert Fry, "The Village of Spread Eagle," *Tredyffrin Easttown History Club Quarterly*, Berwyn, Pennsylvania, Vol. 36, No. 3 (July 1998).

9 Fry, pp. 87–88.

10 Chester County Archive, Pennsylvania Common Pleas Case *Rush vs. Pennsylvania Railroad*, 1885 - Miscellaneous File 1031.

11 The current owner of what was once known as the Eagle Hotel, a structure which now serves as his medical practice, has done some excellent historical research especially about his family's long ownership of the building. He has written a brief history entitled *Acres of Diamonds … The Story of the "Big House" – and those who lived there*. The owner has a particular interest in preserving that heritage, as his paternal grandparents arrived from Italy in 1897 and made their first home in America within the basement of this "Big House." I am grateful for the assistance of Donald J. Rosato, M.D., and his staff for their courtesies.

12 C. Herbert Fry did not, however, provide a citation for his description of the station, but the details of an uncovered second story bridge connecting the former hotel and the adjacent Eagle station are likely attributed to an article entitled "The Strafford Railroad Station" by Cordelia Weller, published in the *Tredyffrin Easttown History Club Quarterly* Vol.14 No.1 (April, 1966), pp. 2–4. Ms. Weller cites her sources this way: "Much of this material was gotten together by Mr. William Armstrong, long the station master at Strafford Station. References taken from old history books are from books in Mr. Howard Okie's library." Yet, farther back, in an article dated June 16, 1950 by Ms. Emma C. Patterson entitled *The old Eagle railroad station – PRR* (as published in the *Bulletin* of the Radnor Historical Society), Ms. Patterson cites the personal recollections of Martha Wentworth Suffren, whose parents, John and Martha Wentworth, owned the large estate which they had named *Strafford* in the 1860s, and which lay adjacent on the east to the Lewis property and the Eagle station. Mrs. Suffren's recollections of that station from 65 years before, as described by Ms. Patterson, are identical to those used by Ms. Weller and Mr. Fry and it thus seems that Mrs. Suffren's recollections are the primary source of any anecdotal description. No official PRR description of the Eagle station has thus far been found.

13 Pennsylvania Railroad Valuation Map.v02.1.PA-11 1918c25p Philadelphia Div ML - Strafford PL

14 In 1884 Miss Bloomer was reassigned from Eagle to the brand new Paoli passenger station, where she served as a popular postmistress for many years.

15 "Folk Names and Other Places No Longer on the Map of Tredyffrin and Easttown Townships: Part III," *Tredyffrin Easttown History Club Quarterly* Vol. 17, No. 4 (October 1979).

16 A stereoscopic view comprises two nearly-identical images, one taken a few inches to the side of the other. When observed through a viewer comprising two lenses set 2.5 inches apart, the result is the illusion of a 3-D picture. In the 1850s, as the wonder of photography was becoming appreciated, stereographs were seen as a form of entertainment and gained tremendous popularity. One of the most popular genres for stereoscopic photographs was railroad scenes, and entrepreneurial photographers like William Purviance made the most of this popularity.

17 George H. Burgess & Miles C. Kennedy, *Centennial History of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, 1846-1946*, 1949, p. 38–39.

18 Albert J. Churella, *The Pennsylvania Railroad, Vol. 1 - Building an Empire, 1846-1917*, 2013. Footnote 43, p. 827.

19 The silhouette of a fashionable woman's skirt in the 1860s was defined by the *cage crinoline*, a device from the latter 1850s consisting of a series of concentric steel hoops attached beneath the skirt. Cage crinolines allowed skirts to reach their largest circumference around 1860. Throughout the decade of the 1860s, the shape of the cage subtly evolved, thereby altering the entire silhouette of the wearer along with it. In 1860, the shape of the skirt was quite large at the bottom, often measuring twelve to fifteen feet in circumference, and appearing dome-shaped and almost equally circular all the way round. But by the mid-60s the fashionable skirt had begun to evolve, and by 1868 had flattened in the front, with most of the volume of the skirt thrown to the back. *Fashion History Timeline, 1860-1869* **https://fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/1860-1869**

20 Newspaper article provided by Radnor Historical Society.

21 Fry, p. 89.

22 Atlases courtesy of the Radnor Historical Society.

23 Wagon and buggy wheels could get caught in the flangeway of the diagonal crossing, preventing the vehicle from being steered across the tracks, but rather forcing it to follow the

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tracks, especially hazardous with an on-coming train. Even today, this hazard applies to bicycles and motorcycles.

24 Vol. VIII, Accession 1807/1810, PRR Engineering Dept., Letter 10703, Hagley Museum & Library.

25 While no official action would be taken for years by the PRR to build an undergrade bridge to carry Old Lancaster Road beneath the rails, a deed dated November 14, 1885 shows that John L. Wentworth had previously concluded a private agreement with the Pennsylvania Railroad. In return for selling the PRR a sliver of land next to the railroad to enable their broadening of the track bed, the railroad had granted Mr. Wentworth a section of land adjacent to the tracks connecting his property to to Eagle Road (now Old Eagle School Road), thereby providing the residents of "Strafford" a safe option for crossing the railroad than the dangerous grade-level crossing at Old Lancaster Road.

25 Vol. VIII, Accession 1807/1810, PRR Engineering Dept., Wentworth Letter, Hagley Museum & Library.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors especially wish to acknowledge the essential research efforts of the following:

- Cliff Parker, Chester County Archives & Record Services
- Greg Prichard, Radnor Historical Society
- Railroad historians Larry DeYoung and Ted Xaras
- Devon resident John Sponseller, owner of an Eagle-area residence once a part of the Strafford Estate



Many local history buffs have remained unaware of the important role of the Eagle Hotel in our early Upper Main Line railroad tradition, and it is essential to draw attention to this truly historic structure that has been so impeccably restored and maintained. While a number of additions have been made over the years to the once square hotel structure, the building, in its current iteration as a medical practice at 176 E. Conestoga Road, can still allow one to easily imagine its important role in our past. *Courtesy of Roger D. Thorne.* [NOTE: A larger version of this image appears on the back cover.]

Thank You

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