Stairs to Nowhere … and other relics at Devon Station

Joyce DeYoung



PHOTO 1: Larry DeYoung descending the "Stairs to Nowhere" in June, 2022. *Courtesy of Joyce DeYoung*

The current Devon Station was built by the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1883 as part of the development of the Devon Inn and surrounding properties, a subject fully discussed in the Winter 2021 issue of the *History Quarterly* dedicated to the Devon Inn story[1]. The Inn is long gone, and the surrounding area has been transformed from the original developers' plans, but the station remains, and there are artifacts of earlier days at Devon visible at the station.

Those who have been in the parking lot on the north side of the tracks at the Devon SEPTA station have probably noticed the set of concrete stairs leading from the parking lot up the embankment to nothing but the backyards of houses on Station Ave. (PHOTO 1) I was curious about them since moving here about 20 years ago, and while working on "The Devon Inn" issue of the *Quarterly*, I was able to satisfy that curiosity. The stairs were apparently put in to aid access to a well-used path that led from the station in the direction of Old Lancaster Road and Valley Forge Road. This path is clearly shown in the accompanying aerial photo from 1926 (PHOTO 2). The path ceased to exist after the land was subdivided for housing in 1948, but the stairs remain, and the area in front of them is still marked as "no parking," as though this is still an active pedestrian way. It's not clear exactly when the stairs were built; the first Mueller *Atlas* map that shows the path is dated 1908.[2]

Another structure that piqued my interest is a small retaining wall on the east side of Waterloo Road just south of the stone arch bridge carrying the railroad. (PHOTO 3) Although today it has no apparent purpose, a postcard from 1910 shows that it was the base of a stairway leading from the road to the station (PHOTO 4). That stairway is also visible (although somewhat obscured by smoke from a passing locomotive) in the 1926 aerial photo.



PHOTO 3: Retaining wall that once supported a stairway from Waterloo Rd. to the station, as seen in May, 2022. *Courtesy of Joyce DeYoung*

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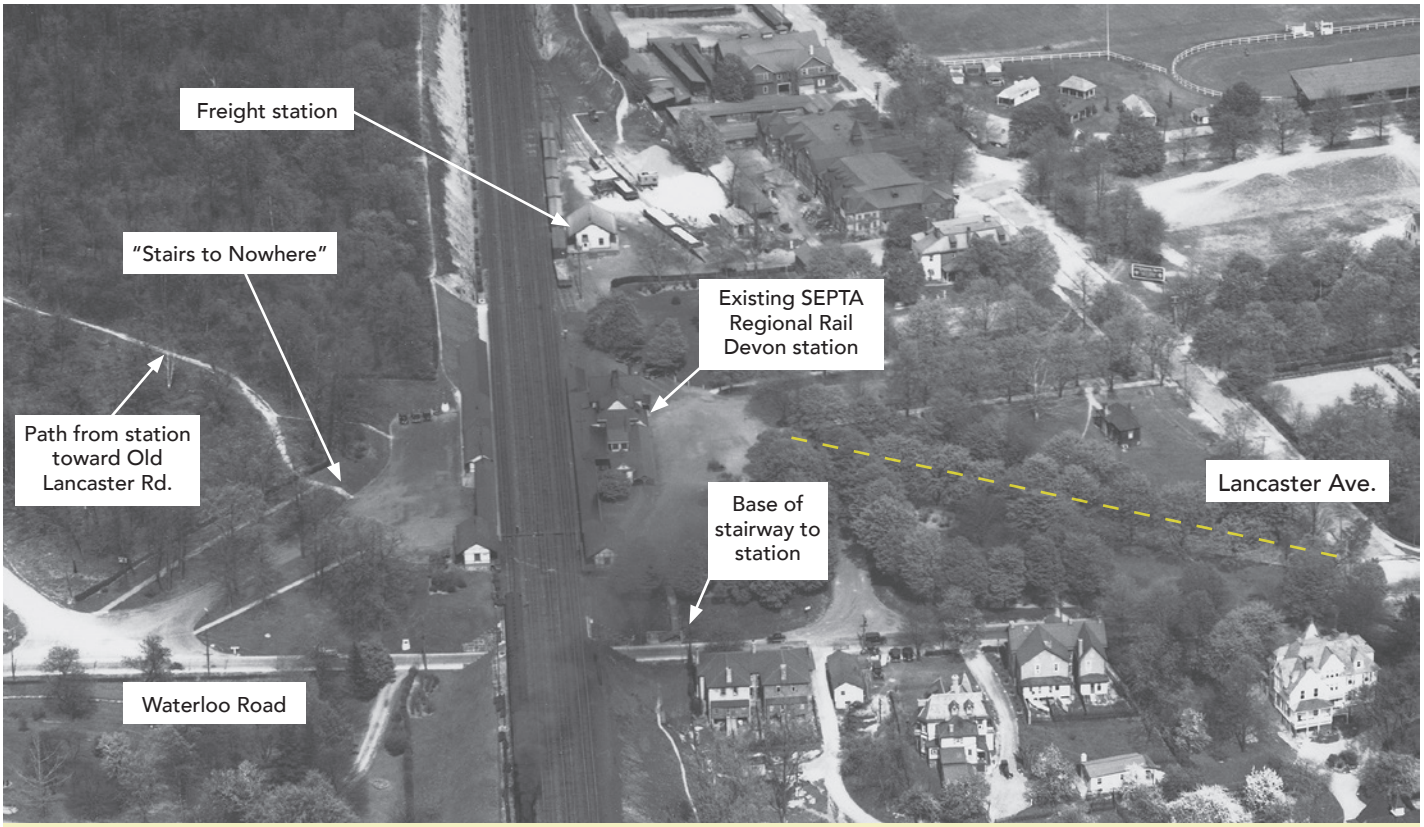


PHOTO 2: This detail from a 1926 aerial photograph shows the path leading from the stairs northeast through the woods toward Old Lancaster Road. You can also see the stairway from Waterloo Road to the station with its masonry base. The freight station can be seen along the eastbound track, just above the original Devon station building. The old route of Waterloo Road through the trees is identified by the dashed yellow line. Also visible are the grounds of the Devon Horse Show in the upper right corner, and the large stable building of the Devon Inn across Lancaster Avenue toward the tracks. Note the plume of smoke from a passing locomotive on the westbound track in the lower middle part of the photo. *Courtesy of the Aero Service Corporation Photographic Negative Collection, Library Company of Philadelphia.*

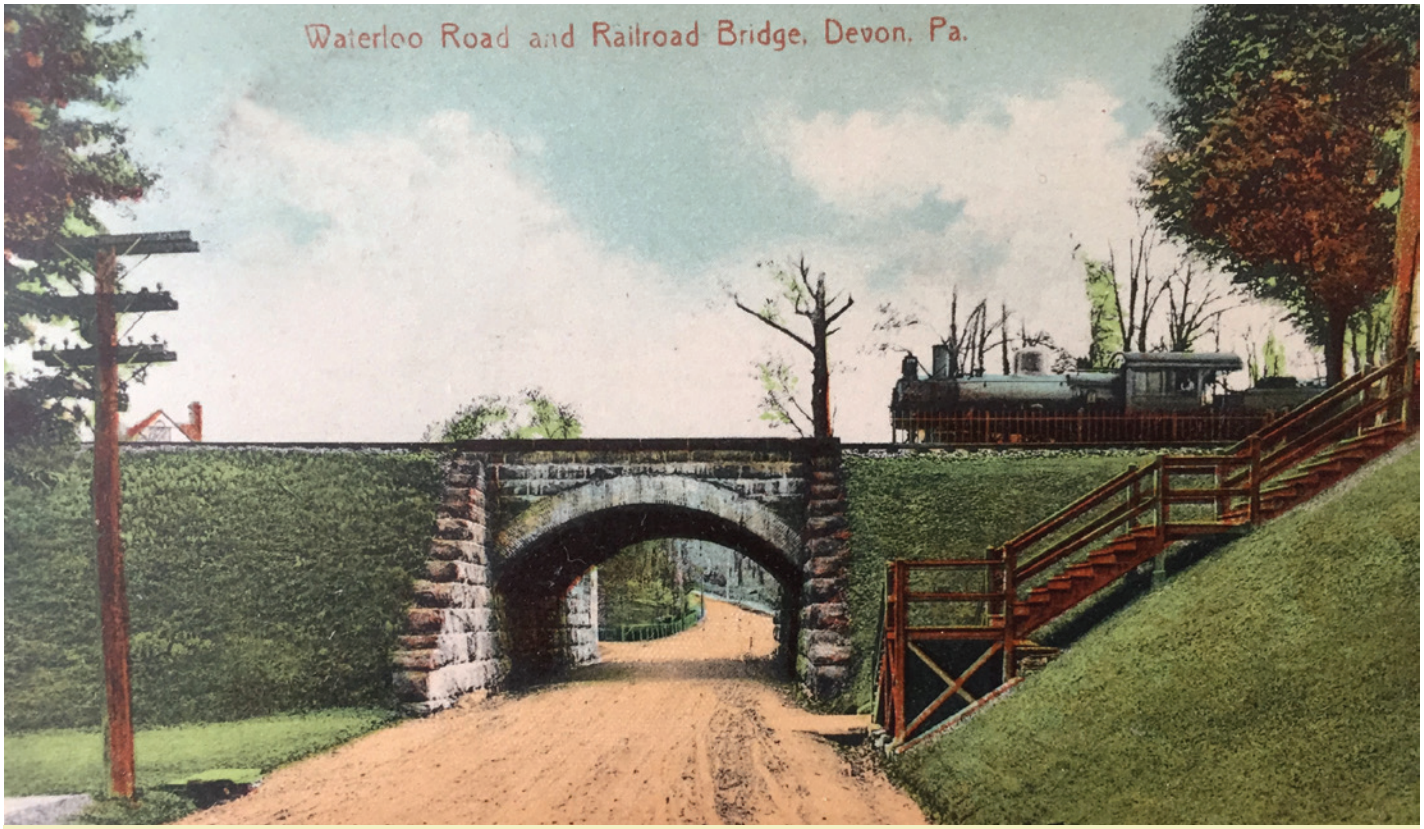


PHOTO 4: 1910 postcard looking north that shows the Waterloo Rd. underpass with the stairs and supporting wall (visible to the right of the lower landing) in the foreground on the right. Note that the road surface appears to be lower than in present times. *Courtesy of the TEHS Archives.*

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Looking east from the parking lot on the south side of the tracks, a concrete platform is visible among the weeds (PHOTO 5). This is what remains of the freight station. Although clearly long out of use, the station was still there in this 1978 photograph (PHOTO 6).

And finally, there is the surprising history of the driveway leading from the corner of Lancaster Avenue and Waterloo Road to the station parking lot (PHOTO 7). This was the original route of Waterloo Road, which crossed the tracks at grade level right where the station is now. Coffin and Altemus, the developers of Devon, wanted to eliminate the road after the underpass was built in order to make that parcel of land more attractive for development. Waterloo Road residents wanted to keep it because it provided convenient access to the station, and they fought, both legally and literally, to keep it open. They won the lawsuit in 1897, and the road remains to this day. The full story of "The Battle of Waterloo Road" can be found on page 26 of the Devon Inn issue of the *Quarterly*. [1]



PHOTO 5: The platform of the former Devon freight station, as seen looking east from the parking lot in May, 2022. *Courtesy of Joyce DeYoung*



PHOTO 5: The former Devon freight station and platform in October, 1978. Note the Studebaker sign on the former parts warehouse in the background. That building still stands on Lancaster Ave. opposite the Devon Horse Show grounds. *Courtesy of Larry DeYoung*

References:

1. Meg Wiederseim, Joyce DeYoung, and John O. Senior, "The Remarkable Story of the Devon Inn," *Tredyffrin Easttown History Quarterly*, Vol. 55 No.4 (Winter 2021).
2. *Atlas of Properties on Main Line Pennsylvania Railroad from Overbrook to Paoli, 1908*. Philadelphia, A.H. Mueller, Pub., 1908.

PHOTO 7: The old route of Waterloo Rd. leading to the station from Lancaster Ave. as seen in 2020. *Courtesy of Larry DeYoung*



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