Historic Photos of a Paoli Parade

Bart Van Valkenburgh

I usually spend time once or twice a week looking through local community Facebook pages for interesting stories and photographs posted by people who want to share their memories of days past. In 2022 I came upon several postings from George Pyle Jr. who grew up in Paoli in the 1950s and now lives in the Midwest. George's early posts were photos taken about 1959 in the vicinity of Paoli train station and the intersection of North Valley Road and Lancaster Avenue. George also posted photos and information about his grandfather William Comer's store in Paoli. George's photos are an important resource depicting the lives, buildings, and automobiles back in the 1950s and 60s.

In May of 2022 George posted some images that really caught my attention—a series of 27 photographs showing an unidentified parade in Paoli, taken sometime after World War II (WWII).

TEHS has an extensive collection of early Paoli photographs, and almost all were taken from a southward-looking perspective, capturing mostly the history of the southern side of Lancaster Avenue (also known as Lancaster Pike). The parade set of photos exclusively look towards the north side of the "Pike," showing in great detail the people, buildings, and businesses of Paoli back then.

I contacted George and he graciously sent me high-resolution copies of the photos and the back story of how they came to be. Starting with this information, I was able to learn much more about these and other photographs George has subsequently donated to TEHS.

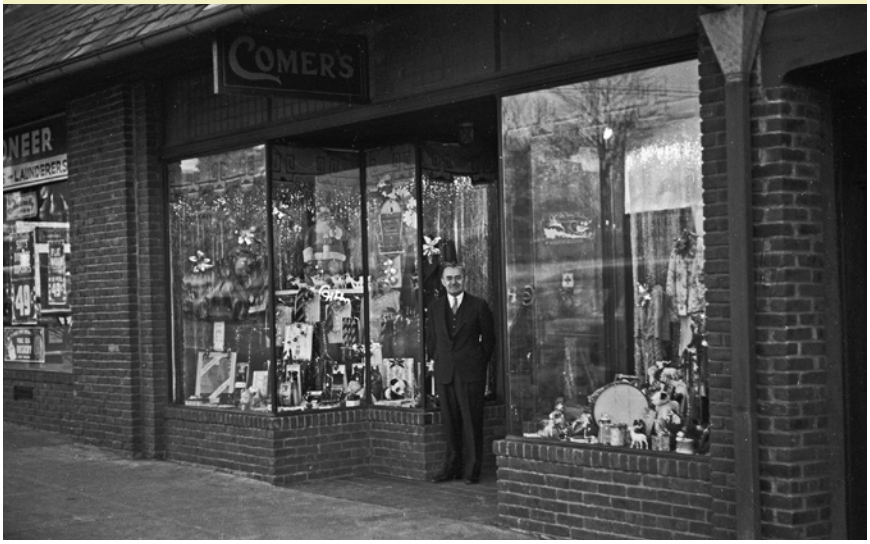
In 1932, George's grandfather William T. Comer opened a department store and haberdashery located at 4 West Lancaster Avenue in the Tudor-style building on the southwest corner of South Valley Road. Mr. Comer was active in the Paoli community and was elected Tredyffrin Township supervisor in 1944 and became chairman of the Board of Supervisors in 1949. Mr. Comer's son-in-law George Pyle Sr. was a skilled amateur photographer and most probably was the person responsible for these parade photos.



Photo taken from the top of the North Valley Road bridge looking southeast about 1959. (GP1) Note ❶ the old Paoli Fire House next to the larger ❷ bank building, and the late 1950's automobiles in the PRR station lot. *Courtesy of George W. Pyle Jr.*



(ABOVE) William. T. Comer (center) at presentation of Tredyffrin Township Police car. (CMR04)
(BELOW) William. T. Comer standing in front of his department & haberdashery store. (CMR01)



Copyright © 2026 Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society. All Rights Reserved. Authors retain copyright for their contributions.
This publication or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher.
Contact the Society for permission to use any content in this publication. The Society does not accept responsibility for the accuracy of the information herein.



Studying this parade photo, I noticed it was taken from a second-floor vantage point and looking at the left side, one can see a roof then a gap then more roof and open casement windows. This lead to an examination of a photo of the Tudor-style building on the south side of the street. (PFC17)



Looking above the arrow one can see the roof line with a gap as well as the casement windows on the second floor. It appears that George Jr.'s father took the parade photos from the second floor looking northward. Interestingly the "apartment" from where the photos were taken is directly above Grandfather Comer's store. *Courtesy of George W. Pyle Jr.*

The next research step was to determine the date and reason for the parade. This photo provided the answers. If you look at the signboard on the float, it says "Remember Iwo Jima" and the men on the truck are reenacting the famous flag-raising on Mt. Suribachi by the U.S. Marines in 1945 so that dates the parade after the end of WWII. The sign on the float also indicates that it is sponsored by the Dalton-Wanzel American Legion Post 646 in Paoli, and asks everyone to Vote "Yes" for the Veteran's Bonus on Nov 8th. Election day is always held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November, so checking the old calendars shows that the only Tuesday November 8th to be found after the end of WWII falls in 1949. So now we know the year of the parade, and the next question is what was the event celebrating?

This one was much easier because most of the photographs are of fire engines from many different departments such as Berwyn, Sellersville, Union FC of Oxford, Radnor, and Bryn Mawr. There is also a very unusual photo of a group of men dressed in turn of the century firemen's uniforms. These marching firemen's helmets have the number 3 emblazoned on the front—Paoli Fire Company just happens to be Station 3. Paoli Fire Company was founded in 1909, so we think this parade could be part of the celebration of their 40th Anniversary. The stores and buildings also have red, white and blue bunting displayed on their façades, so we can also believe the parade was for Memorial Day or possibly the 4th of July.



(ABOVE) Iwo Jima parade float (PFC02) (BELOW) Paoli Fire Co. marching group (PFC10)



Copyright © 2026 Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society. All Rights Reserved. Authors retain copyright for their contributions.
This publication or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher.
Contact the Society for permission to use any content in this publication. The Society does not accept responsibility for the accuracy of the information herein.

The Facebook photographs received many comments from viewers about the vehicles and the Paoli Acme, but there was a very special comment from "Ann B" saying "That's the TE High [School] Band and I see me there." Ann also stated that "there is Mr. Stanley Gray the band leader just behind the majorettes." Many of the other Facebook (FB) comments were about the Acme, with most people thinking the photo was taken elsewhere. Some of the FB comments:

"I don't think this is Paoli, born and raised in Paoli 1950–1974"—"I don't remember the Acme ever being that close to Rt. 30, is it possible these photos are of Wayne?"—"Rosemont? Bryn Mawr? I see the Acme."—"I think that is the Acme is in Berwyn, my dad worked there."—"Did the Acme become a drugstore in the 80s? Maybe a Rite Aid?"—"Are you sure its Paoli, I don't recognize any of the buildings."—"There's a drug store at that former Acme now."



The TE High School Marching Band in the parade. Facebook comment from Ann B. — "There is Mr. Stanley Gray the band leader just behind the majorettes." (PFC18)

This photo shows a great deal of the north side of the Pike, and when enlarged tells quite a bit about life in 1949. (PFC13) The first building west of North Valley Road was the Wedge Building and is not present in this photo. The Acme is the next building located approximately where Citizens Bank is today. Then there is a signpost with a neon sign ❶ that says "Cottage" — probably marking the entrance to the "Cottage Inn," a bar often frequented by railroaders—see "The Upper Main Line" by Richard E. Kurtz, *TEHCQ* Vol. 35 No. 4 (October 1997) p. 146. The famous ❷ Paoli Diner is next—this is the 1934 Jerry O'Mahoney Company diner known to many as "Cavy's Diner" that moved from Paoli to Frazer about 1954. The next properties to the west ❸ advertise Mobil and Lee Tires, and Atlantic Gasoline, at the Cooksey Atlantic service station before their move to east of Darby-Paoli Road. Look closely in the upper left corner for a ❹ barn with "ANTIQUES" emblazoned on the front. This building was located in the present-day Matthews Paoli Ford service department lot, and was demolished when Matthews built a new Gulf gas station in 1950, and the new modern Ford service building in 1954. It is fun looking at the posters advertising products in the Acme store windows. One appears to say "Celery Hearts 19 [cents]," another "Tomato Soup 13 [cans] for $1.00," another "Long Island Cauliflower 25 [cents]," and finally "Roasting Chickens 37 [cents/lb.]."



Copyright © 2026 Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society. All Rights Reserved. Authors retain copyright for their contributions.
This publication or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher.
Contact the Society for permission to use any content in this publication. The Society does not accept responsibility for the accuracy of the information herein.

The photos show the crowds watching the parade—perhaps by today's standards they might seem sparse—but you need to remember that in 1949 Paoli's population was much smaller and the town had fewer businesses. The War Memorial photo (below) is across the street from the old firehouse and just west of the Darby Road intersection and Chestnut Road where the 1950s business area of Paoli ended. Heading east on the Pike were some homes, the old Tredyffrin Country Club golf course and open space.

Our verdict on interpreting the photographs is that the parade is celebrating Memorial Day 1949 and the 40th anniversary of the Paoli Fire Company.

The following organizations can be seen participating in the parade photos:

Fire Companies

Paoli FC; Sellersville FC, Sellersville Pa.; Union FC, Oxford Pa.; Radnor FC, Wayne Pa.; Bryn Mawr FC, Bryn Mawr Pa.; and Berwyn FC, Berwyn Pa.

Marching Bands and Groups

Tredyffrin Easttown High School Marching Band; Hattal–Taylor VFW Post 333 Marching Band, Roxborough Pa.; Lukens Marching Band, Coatesville Pa.; Dalton–Wenzel American Legion Post 646, Paoli Pa.; TriCommunity Cadets Drum & Bugle Corps, Newtown Square, Pa.; and the Paoli Boy and Girl Scouts.



This Bryn Mawr FC pumper appears to be a 1940–48 Ahrens-Fox. (PFC03) Ohio-based Ahrens-Fox fire engines were recognizable by the chromed sphere above the pump that held air and smoothed the pressure fluctuations from the piston pump in the outgoing stream.



Paoli Fire Company Ford Auxiliary Unit adorned with floral arrangements, passing by onlookers sitting on the steps in front of the former Wedge Building. (PFC20) — See "Utley Wedge - Paoli's Prolific Inventor" by Richard Kurtz in *TEHQ* Vol. 46 No. 1 (Winter 2009) p. 4.



Parade watchers on the corner of North Valley Road and Lancaster Avenue at the War Memorial, with a policeman directing traffic before there were traffic lights at the intersection. (PFC22)

Note the "Canal Collector's Office" in the upper left. The historic structure was built shortly after an 1834 mandate from the Philadelphia & Columbia Railroad for a railway toll collector at Paoli (see "Early History of Paoli" by Mike Bertram in *TEHQ* Vol. 51 No. 1, p. 176), and was demolished when the new Paoli PRR station was built in 1953, along with the adjacent parking lot we see there today.

Copyright © 2026 Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society. All Rights Reserved. Authors retain copyright for their contributions.
This publication or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher.
Contact the Society for permission to use any content in this publication. The Society does not accept responsibility for the accuracy of the information herein.