

1997

10 History of the West Chester Railroad 1946-Present

James Jones

West Chester University of Pennsylvania, JJONES@wcupa.edu

David Flogaus

West Chester University of Pennsylvania

Kelly Kulp-Bosler

West Chester University of Pennsylvania

Mike Wolford

West Chester University of Pennsylvania

Bob Gialanella

West Chester University of Pennsylvania

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.wcupa.edu/hist_wchest



Part of the [Public History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Jones, J., Flogaus, D., Kulp-Bosler, K., Wolford, M., Gialanella, B., Cleary, D., Morrison, J., Harre, S., Troutman, R., Bowman, N., Flippin, K., Kurtak, M., McVeigh, K., Smoker, W., Toombes, B., & Callander, D. (1997). 10 History of the West Chester Railroad 1946-Present. Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.wcupa.edu/hist_wchest/99

This Transportation is brought to you for free and open access by the History at Digital Commons @ West Chester University. It has been accepted for inclusion in History of West Chester, Pennsylvania by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ West Chester University. For more information, please contact wcressler@wcupa.edu.

Authors

James Jones, David Flogaus, Kelly Kulp-Bosler, Mike Wolford, Bob Gialanella, Daniel Cleary, John Morrison, Scott Harre, Robert Troutman, Nicole Bowman, Karin Flippin, Mary Kurtak, Kelly McVeigh, Wendy Smoker, Brian Toombes, and Don Callander



History of the West Chester Railroad 1946-Present

This file contains assorted facts from Chester County history collected by students in the HIS480 "Computer methods of historical research" class at West Chester University. Each fact consists of specific information, a reference note to its source, and a date. The "facts" are organized in chronological order.

This file has not been completely proofread, nor have the sources been verified, so use this material with caution.

Collected by Jim Jones, David Flogaus, Kelly Kulp-Bosler, Mike Wolford and Bob Gialanella (Spring 1995). Additional information collected by Daniel Cleary, John Morrison, Scott Harre, and Robert Troutman (Spring 1996); and by Nicole Bowman, Karin Flippin, Mary Kurtak, Kelly McVeigh, Wendy Smoker, and Brian Toombes (Spring 1997). Last edited by Jim Jones (August 9, 1997).

Special thanks to Don Callander of the West Chester Railroad Company for providing notes, photocopies and other materials.

1946/05/24 DAILY LOCAL NEWS (May 24, 1946), from the CCHS
clipping file "WC Transportation, PA.RR 1940-1954"

A railroad strike on the PRR did not prevent the company from operating three trains from WC to Philadelphia, but it was not certain that they could return. Many commuters took cars or the trolley instead.

1948/12/06 DAILY LOCAL NEWS (December 6, 1948), from the CCHS
clippings file: "Transportation, Pennsylvania
Railroad"

Nine freight cars derailed and a coal car overturned completely on the PRR-Frazer near Green Hill. They were part of a 22-car freight that was being pushed from Frazer to West Chester when the lead coal car overturned, pulling the others off the track. There was only minor damage and rail traffic was not delayed, since the line was little-used.

1949/05/02 DAILY LOCAL NEWS (May 2, 1949), in the CCS
 clippings file, "Transportation, Pennsylvania
 Railroad"

Last Saturday night, a train derailed near Aldham on the PRR-Frazer, near a quarry in the vicinity of the William J. Willauer property on State Road. The engineer was Floyd Sancell of Norristown and the conductor was Albert Byerly of 345 Grover Street.

1951/01/31 "Some Trainmen Fail To Report" in DAILY LOCAL NEWS
 (January 31, 1951), in CCHS clipping file:
 "Transportation, PA. RR. 1951."

Fifty workers on the Maryland Division of the PRR called in "sick" this morning, affecting service on the West Chester to Philadelphia line, and between Chester and Wilmington.

1952/07/11 DAILY LOCAL NEWS (July 11, 1952)

The first diesel locomotive reached West Chester on July 11, 1952.

1952/07/11 DAILY LOCAL NEWS, in CCHS clippings file, "West
 Chester Transportation; PA. RR 1940-1954."

Engineer A. B. McCroskey of Malvern brought the first diesel locomotive into West Chester at 10:15am. E. E. Hoopes of Parkesburg was also on board. The engine was on a run from Thorndale to West Chester and return. Station agent Harry Yohn predicted that diesels, because of their cheaper operation and efficiency, would "eventually be exclusively used for loading and shifting freight cars."

1953/05/09 DAILY LOCAL NEWS (June 6, 1953), in CCHS clippings
 file, "West Chester Transportation; PA. RR 1940-
 1954."

A coroner's jury found motorman Garland B. Kincheloe guilty in the death of motorists at the Niels Street crossing on Saturday, May 9, 1953. The PRR was also found negligent for not providing protection devices at the crossing.

The victims of the "worst railroad accident in the borough's history" were Joseph A. Petrushunas (34), his wife Maria Josephine (27), their daughter Marie (aged 4), all of Paoli Pike, Woodcrest, and Mrs. Janet Sherman (19) of 1437 Breeze Point Avenue, Philadelphia, a Petrushunas family house guest.

Testimony came from police officers John Temple and Charles Hill, who were first to reach the scene, and PRR train conductor Louis Carberry (37) of Morton and trainman Robert W. Cheeseman of Philadelphia.

Kincheloe was found to have been traveling too fast (35-40mph) as he approached the unprotected crossing.

1953/06/11 DAILY LOCAL NEWS, in CCHS clippings file, "West Chester Transportation; PA. RR 1940-1954."

The Pennsylvania Public Utilities Commission recommended that the PRR install protection at the Niels Street crossing. This was more necessary than ever since the opening of the Wyeth Inc. Laboratories \$5 million facility on East Niels Street. Records showed that there had been four accidents at the crossing in the past ten years. On May 9, three members of the Joseph Petrushunas family, and a houseguest, were killed at the crossing. Petrushunas was an employee at Wyeth, but was not working on the day of the accident.

1953/06/27 Tom Rettew, writing in the DAILY LOCAL NEWS (June 27, 1953), in CCHS clipping file: "Transportation, PA. RR. 1953."

The railway post office service ended in West Chester this morning when train no. 716 made its last run. Mail would henceforth arrive by truck, although the Red Arrow trolley would continue to carry some of it, according to postmaster Joseph F. Sullivan.

Inside the train, two long-term (22 years) employees sorted the last mail: Howard Elzey of Upper Darby and Laurence Steckel of Upper Darby.

1953/07/17 Tom Rettew, "Survey of Change Not Yet Finished" in DAILY LOCAL NEWS (July 17, 1953), in CCHS clipping file: "Transportation, PA. RR. 1953."

Photo caption: Robert M. Trimble of 14 Stanton Avenue, "The Orchards" (West Chester) was a passenger conductor on PRR-Media line.

The PRR replaced regular train service from West Chester and Philadelphia with a "shuttle" service of 1-3 cars from West Chester to Media. The PRR also ended railway post office

service.

During peak periods, the shuttle consisted of three cars. At other times, only one was necessary.

1954/01/11 DAILY LOCAL NEWS, in CCHS clippings file, "West Chester Transportation; PA. RR 1940-1954."

The PRR announced that it intended to begin ticketing and towing cars parked illegally at the freight yard at Matlack and Chestnut streets. Cars regularly interfered with the movement of freight at the yard.

1954/12/16 "PRR Authorized To Use Crewmen To Guard Union Street Crossing" in DAILY LOCAL NEWS, in CCHS clippings file, "West Chester Transportation; PA. RR 1940-1954."

The Public Utilities Commission authorized the PRR to use train crewmen to guard the Union Street crossing instead of part-time railroad watchmen. They will carry a flag or lantern, and walk across the crossing for all freight and passenger trains. This will cause about a one-minute delay for each train.

1955/03/10 "Piggyback Freight" in DAILY LOCAL NEWS (March 11, 1955), in CCHS clippings file, "West Chester Transportation; PA. RR 1955-1959."

The PRR started piggyback freight service to West Chester with a truck loaded with 30,000 pounds of canned mushrooms from the Brandywine Mushroom company on S. Matlack Street. It was driven to Kensington and loaded onto a flat car by driver Charles Ritchie of Philadelphia.

1955/05/19 DAILY LOCAL NEWS (May 20, 1955), in CCHS clippings file, "West Chester Transportation; PA. RR 1955-1959."

At a meeting between borough and PRR officials, it was agreed to repaint the Market Street station, add parking spaces, improve parking lot security and take steps to eliminate loitering at the station, all in an effort to improve ridership in West Chester.

1955/11/08 DAILY LOCAL NEWS (November 8, 1955), in CCHS clippings file, "West Chester Transportation; PA. RR 1960-1965."

A car driven eastbound by Eugene Brown of 625 E. Miner Street was struck by a train at the Union Street crossing. Brown (age 64) was uninjured, but his passenger, Anna Steele

(age 1&) of 317 E. Miner Street, was treated for abrasions of the scalp. Doris Adell (aged 14) of the same address was also in the car, but not injured. The train engineer, C. B. Kelly, said that the train was traveling roughly 10 miles an hour at the time of the accident.

1956/05/01 DAILY LOCAL NEWS (May 2, 1956), in CCHS clippings file, "West Chester Transportation; PA. RR 1955-1959."

When a commuter train was immobilized for three hours near the Media Station, buses of the Short Line Bus Company carried 107 passengers to West Chester. These passengers would have normally arrived on four trains leaving Media at 5:29, 6:06, 6:50 and 8:31pm. [JJ: This shows that West Chester ridership was low.]

1958/01/18 "Last Toot for Sunday Trains" in DAILY LOCAL NEWS (January 18, 1958), in CCHS clippings file, "West Chester Transportation; PA. RR 1955-1959."

The last Sunday trains to West Chester ran on January 19, 1958. This was part of a long process of declining train service to West Chester that began in early summer 1953 with the schedule change that required West Chester passengers to change trains at Media in order to reach Philadelphia. Since then, the number of trains declined while the price of fares increased. On June 30, 1957, three round-trip trains a day were cut.

1958/01/19 DAILY LOCAL NEWS (West Chester, January 18, 1958) from the CCHS clippings file "West Chester Transportation, PRR"

Sunday train service to West Chester ended on January 19, 1958.

1958/01/26 "Sunday Railroad Service to End Here on January 26" in DAILY LOCAL NEWS (January 4, 1958), in CCHS clippings file, "West Chester Transportation; PA. RR 1955-1959."

Sunday rail service from Media to West Chester was scheduled to end by Sunday January 26, 1958 [JJ: last Sunday service was on January 19]. The PRR management cited declining ridership as the reason.

1959/09/24 DAILY LOCAL NEWS (September 24, 1959), in CCHS clippings file, "West Chester Transportation; PA. RR 1955-1959."

The Public Utilities Commission authorized the

reconstruction of the Gay Street bridge over the PRR, and the widening of the grade crossing over Market Street. the existing Gay Street bridge had a wooden deck, 32 feet wide, with two 14 foot sidewalks. It was to be replaced with a concrete bridge, 41 feet wide, with two 9 foot sidewalks [JJ: total is 59 feet, instead of 60 feet]. The work should be completed by September 1, 1961.

1959/09/24 DAILY LOCAL NEWS (West Chester, September 4, 1959) from the CCHS clippings file "West Chester Transportation, PRR"

The Pennsylvania Railroad received permission to replace the wooden bridge on Gay Street over the Pennsylvania Railroad railroad tracks with a wider, concrete structure. The work was to be completed by September 1, 1961.

1960/12/05 DAILY LOCAL NEWS (December 5, 1960), in CCHS clippings file, "West Chester Transportation; PA. RR 1960-1965."

One track still remained across Chestnut Street in West Chester, although two others had been removed and paved over. It ran east of Matlack Street and was used for shipments to the Farm Bureau store and warehouse.

1961/12/04 DAILY LOCAL NEWS (December 4, 1961), in CCHS clippings file, "West Chester Transportation; PA. RR 1960-1965."

An editorial announced the arrival of a new manager for the PRR Eastern Division, Howard C. Kohout, who replaced George C. Vaughan. It referred to the Market Street station as an "eyesore" and "the present old ramshackle building about which residents have been complaining for years."

1962/08/03 DAILY LOCAL NEWS (August 3, 1962), in CCHS clippings file, "West Chester Transportation; PA. RR 1960-1965."

The Market Street railroad station was vacant except for a ticket office. The borough wanted the PRR to tear it down and erect a smaller station, either at Niels Street or Union Street.

1964/10/06 DAILY LOCAL NEWS (October 7, 1964), in CCHS clippings file, "West Chester Transportation; PA. RR 1960-1965."

Conductor Edward Menig discovered evidence of a small fire in the old train station that appeared to be an act of vandalism. The building has been vandalized a great deal

recently. The PRR was responsible for maintaining the premises, but was unable to keep up with the vandals, even with help from borough police.

Menig tried to clean up a bit each day because one of his favorite passengers was a blind woman with a seeing eye dog, and Menig did not want the dog to cut his feet on the broken glass.

1965/06/13 Charles A. Garrett, untitled article" in PHILADELPHIA BULLETIN (June 13, 1965), in CCHS clippings file, "West Chester Transportation; PA. RR 1960-1965."

Plans were progressing for the demolition of the PRR station at Market Street in West Chester. PRR spokesman Harold Wiand said that the building handled about 6000 passengers a day between Philadelphia and West Chester in the 1920s, but by 1965, only 320 people rode the 18 daily trains from Monday to Friday. There were no longer any through trains--passengers had to change at Media.

Only one small room at the rear of the station was in use--as a ticket office and waiting room.

Wiand thought that a smaller station at Niels Street would serve the town's needs. It had enough parking and was located nearer to the State Teachers College. He projected the construction of a 12x28 foot one-storey metal building to house a ticket office and restrooms.

Borough leaders, including councilman Robert Spaziano, opposed the railroad's plan because they hoped to create a downtown transportation center at the site of the old railroad station.

1965/06/13 Charles A. Garrett, writing in the SUNDAY PHILADELPHIA BULLETIN (Philadelphia, June 13, 1965) from the CCHS clippings file "West Chester Transportation, PRR".

There were plans to demolish the old West Chester railroad station on Market Street and replace it with a smaller station at Niels Street. In the 1920s, nearly 6000 passengers took the train each day to Philadelphia, but by 1965, there were only 320 passengers each day, and only 18 trains a day, down from 40 per day in the 1920s. Borough officials hoped to convince the railroad to keep the station at Market Street as part of a plan to construct a rail-bus center.

1965/09/13 DAILY LOCAL NEWS (September 13, 1965), in CCHS clippings file, "West Chester Transportation; PA. RR 1965."

Hearings were held to consider the PRR's plan to shift its West Chester railroad station from Market Street to Nields Street. The borough and the county both opposed moving the station to a new location.

1965/09/15 DAILY LOCAL NEWS (September 16, 1965), in CCHS clippings file, "West Chester Transportation; PA. RR 1965."

At a PUC hearing, PRR spokesman Charles T. Call described the reasons for moving the station from Market to Nields Street. The PRR wanted to "get out of the real estate business" and eliminate the \$2500 needed to maintain the old station [JJ: over what period? month? year?]. It could also eliminate one stop in West Chester and 0.7 miles of travel between the two stations.

The PRR proposed to construct a pre-fab metal station at Nields Street with a heated waiting room, ticket office, restrooms and drinking fountain. It offered parking for 40 cars and would be staffed eight hours/day by a station agent. The new station would cost about \$20,000 to build, while it would cost \$23-24,000 to renovate the old station.

Call promised no cutback in service--seven trains in and night out each weekday.

The borough objected to the PRR plan because it hoped to establish a downtown transportation center near the old station. Russell Jones, speaking on behalf of Chester County, opposed the plan because it went against long-range plans to improve county mass transit.

1966/01/25 DAILY LOCAL NEWS (January 25, 1966), in CCHS clippings file, "West Chester Transportation; PA. RR 1966-1968."

The PUC denied the PRR proposal to close its Market Street station in West Chester and move it to Nields Street.

A PRR employee is on duty for 1.5 hours each morning at the Market Street station, and works the rest of the day at the freight station near Nields Street.

1966/01/25 DAILY LOCAL NEWS (West Chester, January 25, 1966) from the CCHS clippings file "West Chester Transportation, PA. RR 1966-1968."

The state Public Utilities Commission denied the Pennsylvania Railroad the right to move its station to Nields Street in West Chester.

1967/05/02 "Silverliner Arrives in West Chester" in DAILY LOCAL NEWS (May 2, 1967), in CCHS clipping file: "Transportation, PA. RR. 1967-1970."

Silverliner passenger cars were used for the first time on the Media-West Chester service. Each held 125 people in air-conditioned comfort, and was capable of 86mph, although it would be held to 50mph on the run to West Chester.

1967/09/15 DAILY LOCAL NEWS (West Chester, September 16, 1967) from the CCHS clippings file "West Chester Transportation, PA. RR 1966-1968."

Fire destroyed the Pennsylvania Railroad freight station on Union Street on September 15, 1967. The article includes details on the fire, and also describes what kind of business went on at the station. The station was no longer fully utilized, so the Lasko Products Co. used much of the building to store paint. The cost of damage to the building was only about \$4000, but three boxcars at the station were damaged, resulting in losses of about \$10,000. Two boxcars contained rolls of paper for the Denney-Reyburn company, another had cereal and gravy products from the Grocery Store Products company.

1967/10/06 DAILY LOCAL NEWS (October 6, 1967), in CCHS clippings file, "West Chester Transportation; PA. RR 1966-1968."

The PRR shifted its operations to the old Railway Express building after a fire destroyed the freight station on East Union Street. Station agent Joseph W. Clarke says that he handled 100 freight cars a month worth \$50-100,000, mostly for local light industry, but also incoming to area supermarkets. There are also about 100 passengers a day.

1968/06/15 DAILY LOCAL NEWS (June 15, 1968), in CCHS clippings file, "West Chester Transportation; PA. RR 1966-1968."

Next Monday, demolition of the old PRR station at Market Street will begin. A Wayne contractor, Donato J. Devitis Company, got the contract for the demolition.

1968/06/17 DAILY LOCAL NEWS (West Chester, June 17, 1968) from the CCHS clippings file "West Chester Transportation, PA. RR 1966-1968."

The Pennsylvania Railroad station in West Chester was demolished starting today. According to a photo published on 1968/06/22, the work lasted more than a week.

1968/12/24 DAILY LOCAL NEWS (December 24, 1968), from the
CCHS clippings file: "Transportation, Pennsylvania
Railroad, Frazer Branch"

An ore train partially derailed near Frazier, just downhill
from Immaculata College, on a side track that connected the
Main Line to the Trenton Cut-off. Traffic on the PRR-Main
Line was not interrupted, but the derailed cars sideswipped
another freight train, causing some of its cars to derail.

1970/02/03 DAILY LOCAL NEWS (February 3, 1970), in DAILY
LOCAL NEWS (May 2, 1967), in CCHS clipping file:
"Transportation, PA. RR. 1967-1970."

The Pennsylvania Public Utilities Commission agreed to look
into the Union Street crossing in West Chester following the
collision between a car and a single railcar. The crossing
is protected only by fixed signs, although railroad workers
guard switching operations near the crossing.

1970/04 DAILY LOCAL NEWS (no date) in CCHS clippings file
"Transportation, Pennsylvania Railroad, Frazer Branch"

A \$250,000 project was underway on the Penn Central tracks
near Devault (on the former Phoenixville & West Chester
Railroad line, north of Frazer). It was intended to improve
access to an industrial park in Devault.

1986/04 Frank Tatnall, personal communication (Glen Mills
station, August 5, 1997).

A former Conrail employee current SEPTA employee named Megan
confirmed that the PRR-Media line ceased operations in April
1986.

1997/04/27 Jim Jones, personal observation (Sunday, April 27,
1997).

The first train reached West Chester since SEPTA cut off
rail service in 1985. It was operated by a private firm,
Four States Railway Service, Inc., as the West Chester
Railroad Company. After rebuilding parts of the line from
West Chester to Glen Mills this spring, they brought a
single 65-ton diesel switcher and a single railcar to West
Chester to test their repairs. The enginner was Skip Small
and the fireman was Joe Giacchino.

1997/06/05 Patrick Walters, "Tourist Railroad Movin Ahead" in
DAILY LOCAL NEWS (June 6, 1997), B1.

The president of the operating company, Four States Railway
Service, is Joseph Giacchino. The company leased a portion

of the SEPTA R3 line from Glen Mills to West Chester, and plan to offer scenic excursion trips beginning in the fall. The general manager is Don Calender (sic). JJ: His name is spelled Callander on his business card.

1997/06/05 Anthony Beckman, "Happy Rails in West Chester" in
 PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER (June 6, 1977), B1.

Joe Giaccino was the engineer on a train carrying "the borough's influential business owners and government officials" from West Chester to Glen Mills, a distance of 7.5 miles. Don Callender (sic) served as conductor.

The company leased the railroad from the Borough of West Chester for \$1 after the borough leased the line from SPTA for \$1. The negotiations began in 1992.

The partners invested about \$300,000 so far, including \$27,000 to replace a 150-foot section of track that had ben completely torn out.

When excursion runs begin in the fall, they expect to charge \$8 for adults and \$4 for children.

Company telephone number: 610-430-2233.

1997/06/14 Jim Jones, personal observation (Saturday, June
 14, 1997).

After working for two hours with the track crew of the reborn WCRR, I concluded that even unskilled workers must have learned some concepts of physics--center of gravity, coefficient of friction, use of levers--in order to remove and place railroad ties with as little effort as possible.
