



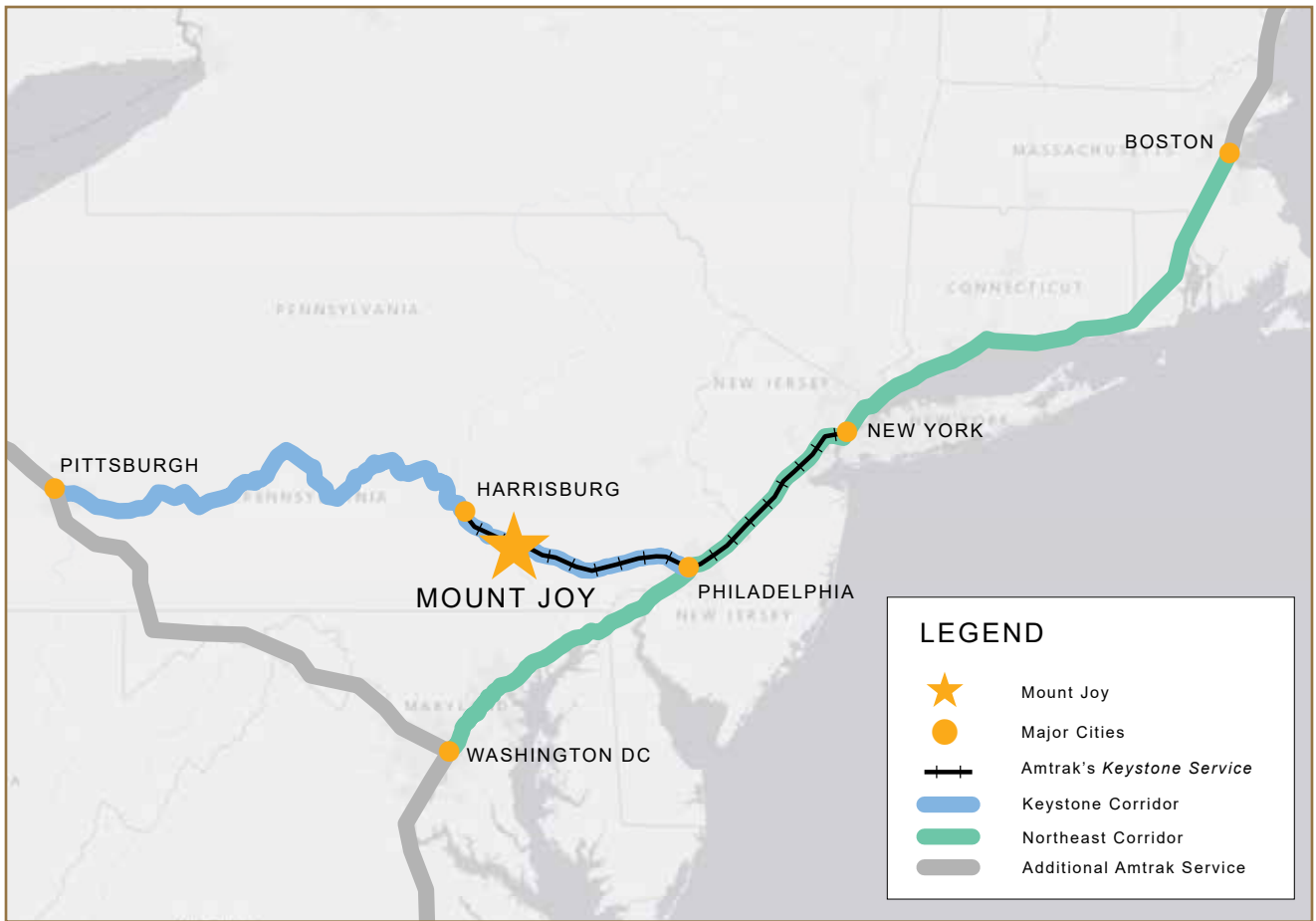
History of the Mount Joy Train Station





This booklet was prepared by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) in cooperation with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to help preserve and publicize the history of Mount Joy Station amid Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) improvements.

January 2021



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▲ 2020 illustration of Amtrak's Keystone Corridor linking Mount Joy to the Northeast Corridor as well as Pittsburgh and points west.

Introduction

The railroad first came to Mount Joy in 1836, when the Harrisburg, Portsmouth, Mount Joy & Lancaster Railroad (HPMJ&L) began service on its newly constructed rail line. More than 100 years later, the historic event was recounted in a 1942 edition of the local newspaper:

The day when the first engine arrived in town was ere long to be remembered. Farmers for many miles around came to see the "Iron Horse" puff and squeal and many were afraid, while others shouted and leaped for joy. Some old people predicted that the world was now coming to an end, when men got so smart as to make live creatures out of iron.

Mount Joy Bulletin
August 6, 1942

The railroad has had a lasting impact on Mount Joy and the surrounding area. Located 12 miles west of Lancaster, Mount Joy has hosted a train stop since the HPMJ&L began service. As of 2020, Mount Joy remained a popular local stop along the Keystone Corridor, which spans the state between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Mount Joy travelers can access Amtrak's¹ *Keystone Service*, a route linking Harrisburg and New York City via connection in Philadelphia to the Northeast Corridor, as depicted on the map. Since its early days, the

railroad has benefited the community by linking Mount Joy to the greater southeastern Pennsylvania region and distant city centers of Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New York.

Mount Joy has witnessed many changes to its railroad line over its 180-year existence. Throughout changing ownership, track realignment, and four different station buildings, the railroad has continued to provide service to passengers traveling to and from Mount Joy.

¹ National Railroad Passenger Corporation doing business as Amtrak®

Early Travel Across Pennsylvania

Understanding the evolution of transportation in Mount Joy begins with considering early travel in Pennsylvania and how those routes influenced the method of travel for passengers and freight.

The First Routes

The earliest transportation routes through Pennsylvania were Native American trails. The Susquehannock and other tribes in the region had trails that tended to be located on dry, level ground, often along river terraces above the floodplain. These routes were so well-placed that European settlers found little need to change them. The settlers used and improved these trails over time, developing them into bridle paths suitable for travel on horseback and, later, wagon trails, roads, and turnpikes. The routes transported both goods and people by foot, horseback, wagon, and carriage. These roads created a network that provided opportunities for trade among small villages and larger cities.

A Native American trail between Lancaster and Harrisburg was one of the earliest routes through the area that would become Mount Joy—in fact the trail ultimately became Mount Joy’s Main Street.

Early Improvements to Major Routes

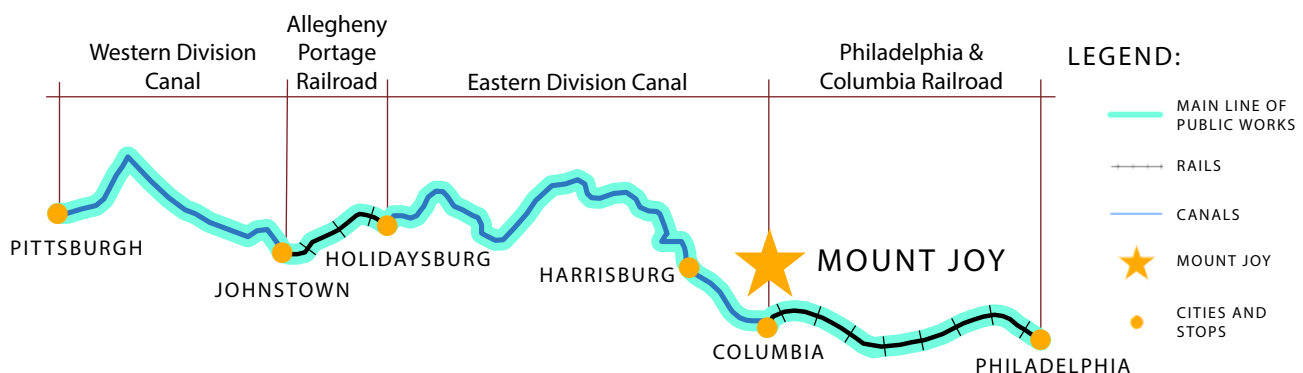
The Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike dates to the late 1600s, when it served as a major route between the Delaware River, near present-day Philadelphia, and Lancaster. It extended from Lancaster to the Susquehanna River at Columbia. In 1791, the Pennsylvania State Legislature ordered the route to be upgraded to a formal turnpike. By 1795, the Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike was complete with crushed stone paving. It provided a much-needed route between the two cities, smaller villages, and agricultural centers in the region.

The Lancaster, Elizabethtown, and Middletown Turnpike Company constructed the Harrisburg Pike in the late 1700s. The company’s goal was to build a private turnpike between Lancaster and Middletown (south of Harrisburg) by developing the existing trail between the two cities. Travelers, businesses, and villages benefited from their connection to the Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike, which completed the connection between Philadelphia and Harrisburg.

Although turnpike travel was an improvement over the earlier trails, it was crowded, slow, and rugged. In an effort to speed up transportation throughout the state the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania planned a

network of canals to more efficiently move passengers and goods to larger markets. A primary goal was to connect Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, but the state’s mountainous terrain made it too difficult to build a single canal between the two cities. The solution was a system that used railroads where canal construction was not possible. In 1826, the Pennsylvania Legislature approved an initiative dubbed the “Main Line of Public Works” to create a cross-state route using canals and railroads. Construction of the Main Line of Public Works was completed in 1834. Passengers could ride the Philadelphia and Columbia Railroad (P&C) between Philadelphia and Columbia, near Lancaster. West of Columbia, freight and passengers transferred from rail cars to canal boats and back three times before reaching Pittsburgh. The journey was long, slow, and complicated. In winter the canals froze, rendering the western portions of the network useless.

To improve connections within the region, and to better compete with the success of New York’s Erie Canal (opened in 1825), Pennsylvania needed a swift and reliable system across the state. An all-rail route across the state would provide faster transportation without the burden of canal navigation.



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▲ The Main Line of Public Works connecting Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. The canal-and-rail route was constructed between 1826 and 1834. Freight and passengers had to transfer between rail cars and canal boats three times to cross the state, and frozen canals halted winter traffic.



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◀ The Harrisburg, Portsmouth, Mount Joy & Lancaster Railroad between Lancaster and Harrisburg through Mount Joy was completed in two segments, fully opening in 1838.

Railroad Advancement and Influence in Mount Joy

While the Pennsylvania State Legislature focused on building a statewide all-rail network, smaller private enterprises worked to link towns with larger urban centers throughout the state. Cross-state transportation was vital for statewide commerce, but local connections were equally important to small villages and urban centers. One such private enterprise was the Harrisburg, Portsmouth, Mount Joy, and Lancaster Railroad (HPMJ&L). It set the stage for all future rail travel through Mount Joy with the first rail line through town, cementing Mount Joy's status as a rail stop.

The Harrisburg, Portsmouth, Mount Joy & Lancaster Railroad (1832-1848)

The HPMJ&L received its charter in 1832. Its purpose was to construct a new railroad to provide freight and passenger service between Lancaster and Harrisburg, with stops in Portsmouth (present-day Middletown) and Mount Joy. The railroad company began construction in 1834.

The railroad opened between Lancaster and Mount Joy by 1836, but

it took another two years to complete the line between Mount Joy and Harrisburg. The segment between Mount Joy and Portsmouth passed through particularly difficult terrain. HPMJ&L had to excavate deep cuts, construct high bridges, and bore a tunnel through Red Hill in Elizabethtown. The 36-mile rail line cost \$850,000, or \$23,611 per mile, including the cost of buildings and locomotives—more than \$23 million in 2020 dollars. When it opened in 1838, the line was a single set of tracks between Lancaster and Harrisburg.

Although Lancaster was the HPMJ&L's eastern terminus, the railroad provided a connection to the Philadelphia and Columbia Railroad (part of the Main Line of Public Works), thus allowing passengers and goods to travel via rail the entire distance between Harrisburg and Philadelphia. The Cumberland Valley Railroad (CVRR) constructed a bridge over the Susquehanna River in Harrisburg between 1837 and 1839. This bridge connected the HPMJ&L to the CVRR, which extended service from Harrisburg to Chambersburg, where it was

possible to connect to Baltimore via the Western Maryland Railroad. The three lines together effectively linked the Mount Joy region by rail to Philadelphia, Harrisburg, and Baltimore.

The HPMJ&L Station

The first railroad station to serve passengers at Mount Joy was the Exchange Hotel, located at the corner of East Main and North Barbara streets. Jacob Rohrer constructed the hotel in the early 1800s by building a large frame addition to a small brick tavern that Alexander Campbell had established in 1768 along the Harrisburg Pike.

In the early days of railroading, it was common for existing hotels and taverns to serve as stations. The buildings were along well-traveled routes and were readily equipped to provide the necessary amenities for passengers and crew. The Exchange Hotel was conveniently located adjacent to the tracks, in the heart of Mount Joy. The HPMJ&L began using the hotel as the Mount Joy station shortly after opening service on the line in 1836.

► The 1876 Pennsylvania Railroad station building was near the present-day corner of North Market and Old Market streets, and served as Mount Joy Station for 20 years.



Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania, Ralph Snyder Collection

The Pennsylvania Railroad (1848–1968)

The Commonwealth chartered the Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR)—nicknamed the “Pennsy”—in 1846 to achieve the vision of a convenient and profitable cross-state rail route. The PRR constructed new lines and leased and purchased several existing lines, including the HPMJ&L and parts of the Main Line of Public Works. In 1848, the PRR and the HPMJ&L reached a lease agreement that allowed the PRR to operate the HPMJ&L line and use it as their exclusive route between Lancaster and Harrisburg. In exchange for rent, the HPMJ&L agreed to maintain and improve the tracks. The agreement allowed the PRR to provide through service for freight and passengers between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Although this attained the railroad’s primary objective, the route was still inconvenient. Passengers had to change lines and in many locations—notably the Red Hill tunnel in Elizabethtown—track restrictions would not accommodate the PRR’s largest trains.

In 1857, the PRR purchased the Main Line of Public Works from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for

\$7.5 million. As part of that deal, the HPMJ&L was incorporated into the PRR network as part of the Pennsylvania Railroad: Philadelphia to Harrisburg Main Line. In early 1858, the PRR enlarged the Red Hill tunnel. Finally, on July 18, 1858, the PRR operated the first direct passenger train between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. A passenger could now travel across Pennsylvania without changing cars.

First PRR Station

When the PRR began operating the HPMJ&L’s railroad under lease agreement in 1848, the company continued to use the Exchange Hotel as the Mount Joy passenger station. It was not until 1876 that the PRR constructed a new, dedicated passenger station near the present-day corner of North Market and Old Market streets.

The new station was a Victorian-style wood building. It had a single-story waiting area and featured a two-story tower with a cone-shaped roof. It provided larger facilities than those available at the Exchange Hotel, and it served both passengers and freight. The building was near East

Market Street, strategically located in an area surrounded by important industrial operations including malting and milling facilities and a brewery. Eleven years after completion, the PRR built a two-and-one-half story residential addition on the east end of the building for the ticket agent and his wife.

The 1876 station building remained in service until the PRR realigned the railroad through Mount Joy in 1896 (discussed on page 6). After the realignment, the 1876 building was used as office space for the railroad agent until 1942, when the PRR demolished the passenger and freight station portion of the building. The station agent’s dwelling remained as a freestanding structure. It functioned as a private residence and then the local VFW headquarters until it was demolished in 1953.

Pennsylvania Railroad Concerns and Changes in Mount Joy

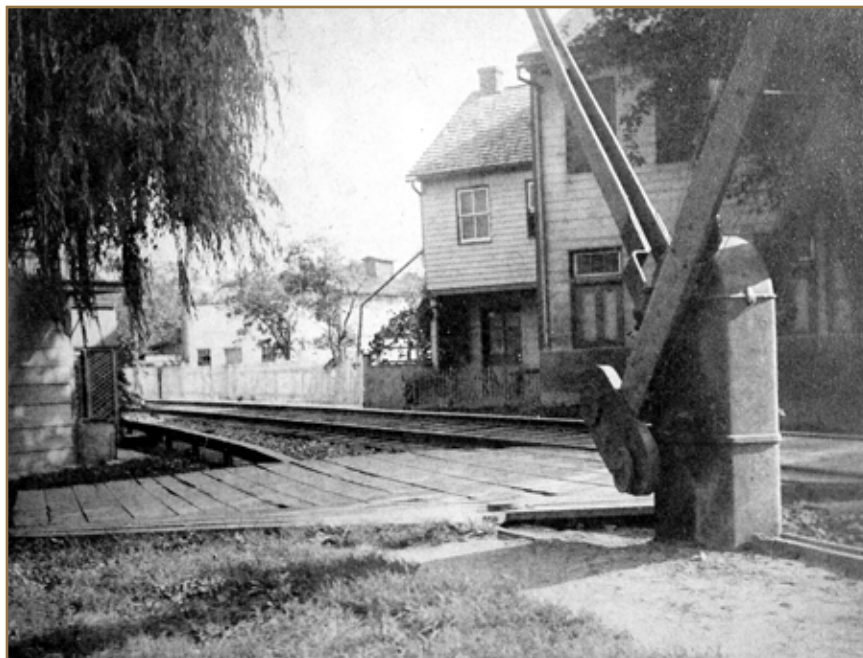
Although the PRR's acquisition of the HPMJ&L was a major steppingstone in its vision for a competitive statewide rail network, there were still hurdles to be crossed. The PRR expanded its system in part by leasing and purchasing smaller railroads, however many had operational and safety issues or concerns, and the rail lines through Mount Joy were no exception.

The HPMJ&L tracks ran for several blocks through the populated and busy center of Mount Joy. There were 12 at-grade road crossings through town. The rail line traveled west between East Donegal Street and Sasfras Alley before turning northwest and crossing several streets, including South High, East Main, and North Barbara streets on a dangerous curve with limited visibility.

Safety at these at-grade crossings was such a concern that when Mount Joy incorporated as a borough in 1851, one of its first ordinances required that trains restrict their speed to no greater than eight miles per hour through town. The ordinance also mandated that each train signal with a bell or whistle at all 12 street crossings to alert people in the surrounding area to the presence of the passing train. Although the number of accidents or close calls which occurred prior to the ordinance is unknown, the danger at the crossings must have been a significant local concern.

By 1864, nine trains passed through Mount Joy daily, increasing the risk of accidents. One particularly notable accident occurred on the morning of March 20, 1880, when a train struck a horse and rider near the Exchange Hotel—not once, but twice. A newspaper article recounted the event and noted that after being struck twice, amazingly the horse got up and ran off while the rider was brought to the hotel and placed under the care of a physician.

Other incidents did not turn out so well. In 1883, a train struck a buggy as it was crossing the Fairview Street



Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania, Ralph Snyder Collection



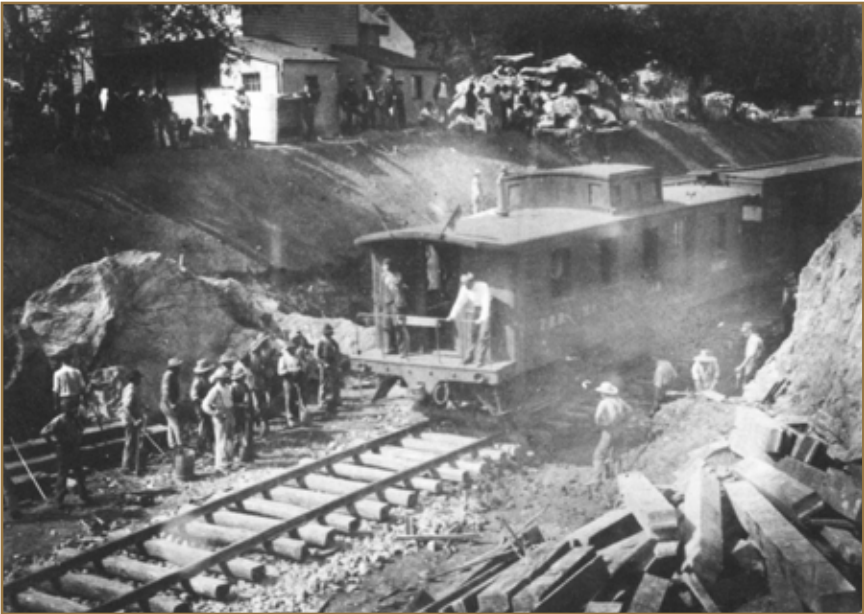
Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania, Ralph Snyder Collection

▲ Main Street at Barbara Street, looking west (top) and looking east (bottom). Tracks ran through the heart of town, with 12 at-grade road crossings that proved dangerous and sometimes deadly.

tracks, killing three of the buggy's passengers. The tragedy increased public attention to the dangers of the at-grade crossings in Mount Joy.

Although the intersections were particularly dangerous, they were not the site of every recorded railroad accident in Mount Joy. In 1888, a man named Henry Gantz intentionally stood on the tracks, jok-

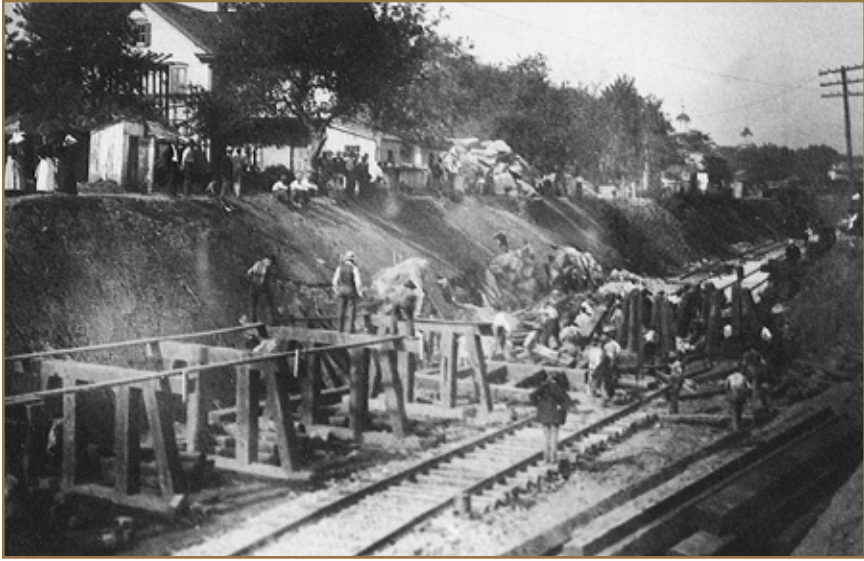
ing to his friends that he would "knock the engine off." Although Mr. Gantz attempted to jump away from the approaching train, he was not quick enough, and his death brought further attention to the danger of easily accessible track beds in Mount Joy.



Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania, Ralph Snyder Collection

The PRR operated the former HPMJ&L rail lines for many years prior to initiating any major track improvements, but by 1894 there were 29 daily trains through Mount Joy. It became clear to PRR executives that the time had come for major safety improvements. In the late 1890s, the PRR instituted a capital improvement campaign throughout its railroad system, including at Mount Joy. The PRR's Chief Engineer William H. Brown oversaw the statewide program.

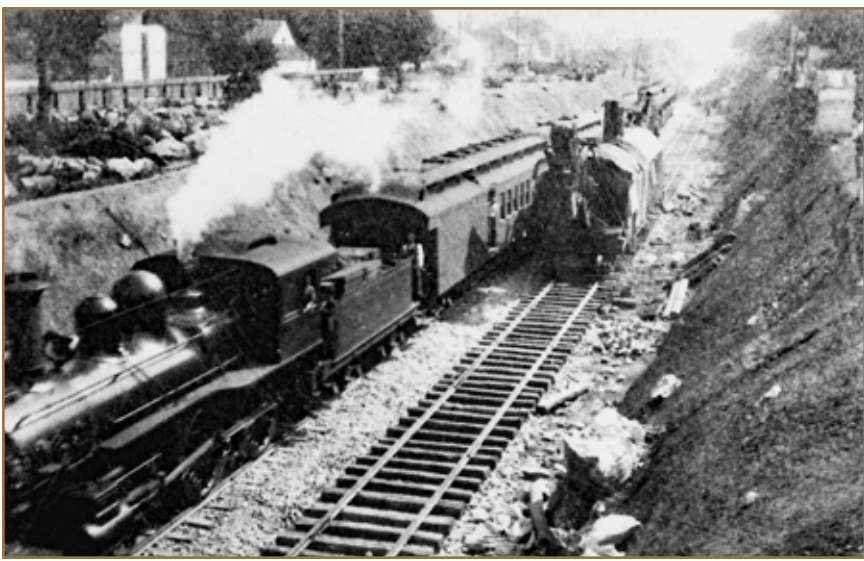
To improve safety and efficiency along the line in Mount Joy, the PRR purchased a large plot of land for a new set of tracks to eliminate the "S" curve. The land was south of the original alignment, in the area between present-day West Henry and West Donegal streets between Marietta Avenue and the western limits of Mount Joy.



Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania, Ralph Snyder Collection

The PRR constructed the new alignment below grade, digging a wide trench and laying the new tracks at the bottom. This "cut" allowed the railroad line to pass below the existing streets, which the PRR furnished with new bridges to carry travelers safely over the rail line. Although the PRR removed most of the old at-grade alignment, a large segment remained to provide rail access to adjacent businesses. As of 2020, the siding continued to serve a flour mill.

The cut reduced the potential for crashes and also proved advantageous to operations. Through trains, which provided express service between Lancaster and Harrisburg, safely sped through Mount Joy without delay.



Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania, Ralph Snyder Collection

◀ **Top and middle: Pennsylvania Railroad crew constructing "the cut," circa 1896. Lowering the tracks to run beneath Mount Joy's streets improved safety and allowed through trains to travel at higher speeds.**

Bottom: Among the first trains on Mount Joy's new alignment, circa 1896.



Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania, Abendschein Collection

▲ Celebrating the first train through the cut at the third Mount Joy passenger station, September 11, 1896. The new station building is not quite complete.

A New PRR Station

After the PRR realigned the railroad through Mount Joy, a new passenger and freight station was needed on the new alignment. In 1896, the PRR constructed a new Mount Joy passenger and freight station on the north side of the cut, on East Henry Street between South Market and Delta

streets. The new building was 23 feet by 42 feet and contained a ticket office, waiting room, and office and storage rooms for the PRR signal man, Chester Brown. The station included an apartment on the second floor.

The building was constructed of brick and stone, with wide eaves forming a passenger shelter. An ad-

ditional passenger shed at track level provided shelter along the south platform. A pedestrian bridge adjacent to the train station spanned the cut and allowed passengers to safely walk between the platforms. An elevator on the north platform brought luggage up from the track to street level.



Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania, Ralph Snyder Collection

► Looking east at trackwork in the cut, circa 1896.



Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania, Ralph Snyder Collection

▲ Looking west at the 1896 station, elevator tower, and pedestrian bridge, circa 1900.

The PRR continued to operate freight and passenger service into the 20th century. In 1917, the HPMJ&L shareholders sold the last of their stock to the PRR, which then owned the line outright.

In 1937, the PRR removed the pedestrian bridge to make way for cat-

enary towers. The catenaries carried the electrical lines used to power the trains when the PRR electrified the route between Philadelphia and Harrisburg. Passengers used the Marietta Avenue bridge to cross the tracks.

Rail–Dairy Mishaps

Business ran smoothly for the Pennsylvania Railroad during the first half of the 20th century, although a few out-of-the-ordinary incidents produced some humorous anecdotes:

On June 12, 1905, two workers were unloading a shipment of butter when a westbound express train hit the cargo. The workers were able to jump to safety, but 1,700 pounds of butter splattered all over the tracks, the fencing, the passengers standing along the station platform, and a bridge two blocks away!

Another dairy-related incident occurred in 1913 when the station platform elevator malfunctioned. This time, the freight was a 1,200-pound load of cream. As workers brought the cream up from the tracks, the elevator’s mechanism failed, and the cream dropped 10 feet. Fortunately, only one pint of cream spilled.

Railroad Decline and Consolidation

The years leading up to and during World War II were difficult for railroads throughout the U.S. Although the PRR was busy during the war years transporting U.S. Army freight and even German prisoners of war, the war significantly taxed the nation’s population and economy. Railroad companies experienced an overall decline in ridership and lacked funds for maintenance and expansion. In 1946 the PRR reported a net loss for the first time in its 100-year history.

The end of World War II marked the beginning of the end for the PRR. The Interstate Highway Act of the 1950s increased automobile traffic, which threatened the PRR’s dominance of transportation throughout the region. Despite steady ridership on commuter trains in the Philadelphia area, 1958 was the last profitable year for the PRR as a whole. The railroad company continued to hang on and remained active in transporting passengers and freight, but to a lesser degree than in its early history.

The statewide decline of railroads affected Mount Joy. The PRR shuttered its Mount Joy Station in June 1957 due to declining ridership, though it

retained limited passenger service. Passengers boarding eastbound trains waited in the 1896 passenger shed on the south side of the tracks. Westbound passengers waited below the eaves of the closed station.

In 1964, the railroad demolished the 1896 passenger shed. Although two daily Harrisburg commuter trains continued to stop in Mount Joy, the era of convenient passenger service on the PRR effectively ended.

Penn Central (1968-1976)

As U.S. railroad use declined, many railroads merged to remain viable. In 1968, the PRR merged with its long-time competitor, the New York Central Railroad, to form the Penn Central Transportation Company. The merger failed and within two years the Penn Central filed for bankruptcy—the largest corporate bankruptcy in the history of the U.S. at the time. The Penn Central continued to operate in bankruptcy until 1976.

Mount Joy was served by limited passenger service—two daily Harrisburg commuter trains. The station building remained open to freight service through 1972, but was ultimately



Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania, Abendschein Collection

- ▲ The 1896 station building in the 1950s
- ▼ The building in 1975, prior to demolition



Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania, Paul Wilson Collection

abandoned. Despite some objections from local residents, the 1896 station building was demolished in 1975 to make way for a parking lot.

Amtrak Service (1971-Present)

In 1971, the U.S. Congress formed Amtrak, a government corporation, to operate passenger service on the tracks of the Penn Central and other railroads in the U.S. Amtrak assumed ownership of the lines that extend between New York and Harrisburg, via Philadelphia (now known as Amtrak's Keystone and Northeast corridors). Amtrak's *Keystone Service* provides daily passenger service along the route between New York and Harrisburg, with a stop in Mount Joy.

With no station building, passengers waited in small shelters on the station platform next to the tracks. There were no ticket agents at the stop, so passengers purchased tickets from the conductor once aboard the train. In later years, tickets could be purchased online.

Steep stairs were the only means of access to the tracks, making Mount Joy Station difficult for all users and impossible for many people with disabilities.



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▲ Passengers boarding a westbound Amtrak train, circa 2012.

▼ Looking south at the tracks, stair-only access, and limited passenger amenities, 2017.



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Commonwealth Media Services

2019 Amtrak Station

In 2017, PennDOT began construction of a new Mount Joy Station on the north side of the cut, in the same general location as the 1896 station. The new station opened in 2019 and provides improved Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility, station functionality, and passenger amenities, including ample parking for bicycles and motor vehicles.

As of 2020, more than a dozen passenger trains served Mount Joy daily.



Commonwealth Media Services

▲ Above, left: Local, state, and federal officials at the October 2019 ribbon-cutting for Mount Joy's newest station.

◀ The building includes architectural elements that echo the 19th century architecture of downtown Mount Joy.

▼ The windows feature an etching of the Mountjoy, the ship after which the town is named.



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◀ Indoor stairs between street level and the platforms.



Commonwealth Media Services

- ▲ Elevators and high-level platforms allow passengers to board and disembark trains without having to negotiate stairs.
- ▶ Looking west toward the pedestrian bridge on Market Street from platform level, 2019.



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- ▶ Looking west toward the station from the reconstructed East Henry Street parking lot, 2019. Improvements to Mount Joy's overflow parking lots north of the station, including pedestrian walkways, were completed in 2012 as a first phase of the train station project.



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Acknowledgements

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