

WYNNEWOOD RAILROAD STATION
Wynnewood Road and Pennsylvania Road
Wynnewood
Montgomery County
Pennsylvania

HABS NO. PA-6144

HABS
PA
46-WYNN,
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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Location: Wynnewood Road and Penn Road, Wynnewood, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.

Significance: During the last quarter of the century, the Philadelphia firm of Wilson Brothers and Company designed many of the Pennsylvania Railroad's suburban stations. Wynnewood Station is the only one of the five they designed in Lower Merion Township which has survived.

Description: Wynnewood Station sits across the former Pennsylvania Railroad main line at a point where the tracks run east and west. Wynnewood Road, at this point a commercial strip, provides access to the southern or inbound ticket office and parking area; Penn Road leads north from Wynnewood Road, crosses under the tracks, and serves the northern platform and parking area before continuing north.

There is one structure on each side of the tracks at Wynnewood. The larger of the two, serving the inbound tracks, is a ticket office and waiting room made from rough-cut stone. The main section of the building is a one-and-a-half-story rectangle, and on the eastern facade is a one-story addition of the like materials. Both have asphalt shingled gable roofs, with decorative trusses in the gable ends. There is also an exterior brick chimney on the eastern end of the main block. Each of the three bays of the southern facade of the main block contains a pair of elongated rectangular two-over-two-light sash windows with quoining of alternating blocks of serpentine stone and sandstone. One course of serpentine blocks continues across the top of the windows in a belt course. Above the center bay is a wall dormer which features a now-boarded diamond-shaped window and decorative wooden truss work. The one-story section has a smaller, one-over-one-light sash window surrounded by quoining.

Along the western side of the building are a short flight of stairs and a wheelchair ramp leading to the platform and the main entrance. The evidence suggests this door is a replacement for an earlier, taller doorway. There is also a door on the eastern end of the structure. The building's northern facade strongly resembles the southern: three taller windows in the main section, one smaller on the eastern wing, all surrounded by sandstone and serpentine stone, and a wall dormer with a diamond-shaped window and decorative truss work. Facing the tracks is a pent roof which connects to the gable roof covering the waiting area to the west of the ticket office. Turned posts and curbed braces are part of the canopy's exposed structural system. The bottom half of the posts are painted red, while their tops, braces, and the roof elements are cream. On both sides of the canopy cross-gables with arched bargeboards denote the path from

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the parking lot to the platform. The waiting area continues to the east of the building. Here a flat roof slopes gradually to the south and is supported by square posts and angle braces. The platform is built of brick laid in a herringbone pattern. Renovations done during the last ten years significantly altered the interior. Though the original benches remain along the north wall, new offices for the ticket agent and for a Montgomery County information officer occupy most of the southern half of the room. The main waiting room now has a dropped ceiling, and a restroom and a storage area are located in the one-story addition to the east.

Wood railings with parallelogram cutouts surround the stairway which leads down to the brick, barrel-vaulted tunnel connecting the two platforms. The one-story open shelter on the north side of the tracks shares many elements with its partner but is noticeably different. It is covered with an asymmetrical gable roof whose trackside eave is steeper and shorter. Along the structure's western, northern, and eastern sides run walls which feature exposed framing, vertical siding, and mock windows with flat arches. In the center of the shelter is a waiting room which is open to the west. Just to the west of this waiting area is a door which leads to the parking lot. Turned posts and curving braces support the roof, which is covered with metal. Along the track side is a cross gable with an arched bargeboard which aligns with a similar gable on the inbound side. Wrought iron railings surrounding the stairway on this side, and the platform is made from bricks laid in a herringbone pattern. Gooseneck streetlights begin at the eastern end of the shelters on both sides.

History: Until the Civil War Wynnewood was primarily a farming community. The name originally applied only to the estate of the daughter of Thomas Wynne, a physician and the first speaker of the Pennsylvania colonial assembly. Over time "Wynnewood" was applied more broadly, first to the local school district, then to the community as a whole.

The growth of the Pennsylvania Railroad after 1865 led to a series of changes in the area. Running through Wynnewood was the Pennsylvania's "Main Line," a name originally describing an antebellum series of tracks, canals, and inclined planes but which later came to refer to the surrounding area. After the war the railroad four-tracked the Main Line between Philadelphia and Paoli, west of Wynnewood, and dramatically improved its commuter service. The reasons for this upgrading remain unclear, since it appears to have been unprofitable. The Pennsylvania may have made money by developing land it owned near Bryn Mawr, or the service may have been a way to showcase the railroad to its

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financiers, who generally lived along the Main Line.¹

Part of this improvement was the construction of new, more elegant stations. Many of these, including Wynnewood, were designed by the Wilson Brothers. Both John and Joseph Wilson attended Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute just before the Civil War; each then held a number of positions working for railroads, including the Pennsylvania Railroad. In 1876 they formed, along with Frederick Thorn, Wilson Brothers and Company; the firm designed a variety of structures, including residences, commercial buildings, and medical facilities.²

Some of their best-known work was on train stations. With Joseph as chief architect, they designed at least ten stations along the Main Line during the last quarter of the century. Wynnewood station illustrates their characteristic Stick Style and use of masonry and wood. Wynnewood is, however, simpler and smaller than neighboring (and since demolished) stations at Ardmore and Bryn Mawr. The exact date of its erection remains unclear: an 1871 real estate map shows a station on the present site, yet the creation of the firm remained five years in the future.³

The development of the station took place in two stages. Before 1900 the area shifted from farming to a community of estates, including one on either side of the station. After 1900, and especially after World War I, the number of single family homes increased rapidly. The areas around the station did not participate in this trend. The Shortridge estate, south of the tracks, was developed only after World War II; north of the line the twenty-six-acre Gibson estate remains today.

After World War II commuter service began to deteriorate. Ridership declined as a result of the increasing popularity of cars and the movement of employment out of the center city. The Pennsylvania began losing millions on its commuter services, and

¹ Herbert H. Harwood, "Philadelphia's Victorian Suburban Stations," The Railway History Monograph, Vol. IV, Number 3 (July 1975), p. 1-10.

² Sandra L. Tatman and Roger W. Moss, Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects: 1700-1930 (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1985), p. 869-71.

³ Wilson Brothers and Co., Catalogue of Work Executed (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1885), p. 12; Harwood, "Philadelphia's Victorian Suburban Stations," p. 22; Atlas of Montgomery County and the State of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: G.M. Hopkins, 1871).

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station maintenance suffered accordingly. By the 1960s the entire railroad was losing tens of millions each year, with a further decline in the station's conditions. A 1968 merger with the New York Central simply increased financial problems, and in 1970 the Penn Central declared bankruptcy.⁴

In April 1976 Amtrak took ownership of the station. In 1983 the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA), a quasi-governmental organization in charge of mass transit throughout the region, began leasing the station. In 1991 Montgomery County subleased the ticket office, installing an information booth and relocating the ticket booth. Throughout all these changes the station has remained in good condition.⁵

Sources:

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⁴ Joseph R. Daughten and Peter Binzen, The Wreck of the Penn Central (Little, Brown, Boston, 1971), p. 131-139.

⁵ Philadelphia County Deed Book EFP 419:400 (11 March 1982).