

THE NORTH PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD

When the North Pennsylvania Railroad was being established in the 1850s, its proponents had visions of a great network of commerce and travel that would enable Philadelphia to compete with—and even eclipse—New York. In their literature they proposed advantages not just to Philadelphians but to all the communities lying along the proposed railroad's path:

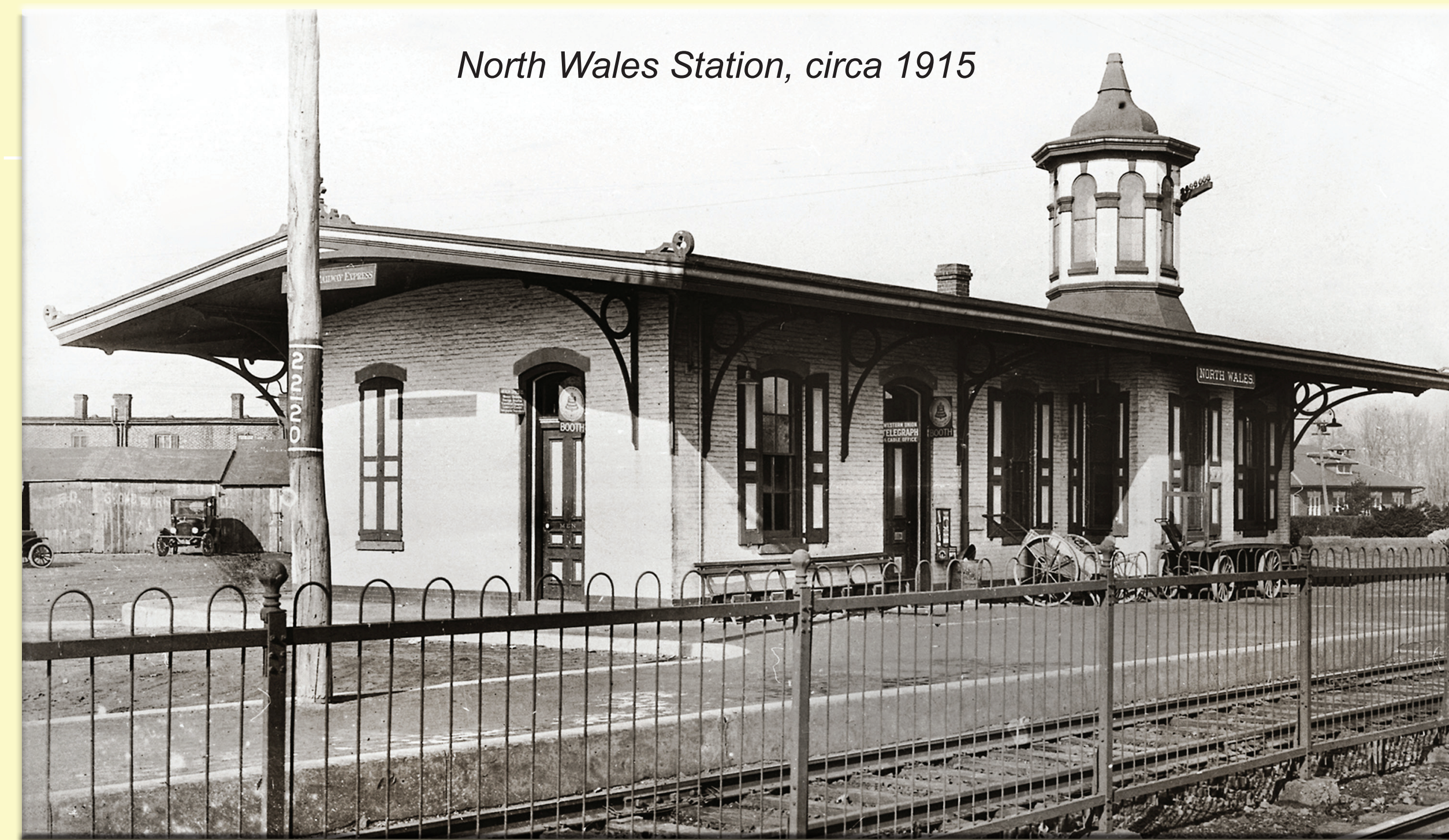
The North Pennsylvania Railroad will pass through eight of the most valuable counties of the State, abounding in limestone, marble, iron ore, zinc, slate, anthracite and bituminous coal, forest timber and cereal produce.

At distances alternating throughout its whole length there are quarries, ore beds, iron works, factories, work shops, towns, villages, mills, mines, forest and farming districts. The excess production of one particular article or staple at one point, will be sent to satisfy the requirements of another point. From the mining regions an immense tonnage will pass both ways; the population of those regions, drawing largely upon other places for domestic supplies of clothing and food, create an active market. The towns and villages, each the centre of a trade gathered from and distributed through the vicinage [sic], will furnish business in either direction. Its course is through the agricultural portions of the counties of Montgomery and Bucks, the manufacturing portions of Lehigh and Northampton, the mining portions of Carbon and Luzerne, and the agricultural portions of Wyoming and Bradford. Business will pour upon the road from a fruitful country on either side, and from one station to another there will be kept up a constant interchange of commodities, while from each station and the city there will ebb and flow a steady and active intercourse. The products along the route are as varied as the face of the country; and the pursuits which employ the population at different localities are as unlike and dissimilar as the articles furnished in the result of their labors. Out of this difference of occupation and production grows an interchange, which is the basis and substance of a local trade, to be facilitated by railroad accommodation.

From *Philadelphia's Great North Route: North Pennsylvania Railroad, to Connect Philadelphia with North Pennsylvania, Western New York, The Lakes and Canada West, 1853*



Baldwin Locomotives, Voyageur Press, 2010



North Wales Station, circa 1915

Courtesy of Phil Ruth

NORTH WALES STATION

Stations were established at rural communities along the North Pennsylvania's route, and it was fitting that one be constructed in North Wales, the community at the railroad's intersection with the Sumneytown and Spring House Turnpike. The first station built in North Wales, around 1857, was probably a rustic facility, for it was replaced in 1863. Historic maps reveal that these early stations were located on the east side of the tracks between North Wales Street (now Main Street) and Second Street.

In 1873, the current station was built on the west side of the tracks, several blocks to the north. Constructed of brick, the one-story station was similar in form to that built at Glenside, with its shallow-pitched roof and prominent cupola. The deep overhanging eaves of the North Wales train station had simple, elegant cast iron brackets.

In 1879, the North Pennsylvania Railroad was leased for 999 years by the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad, becoming that line's "Bethlehem Branch." This long lease was common in an era when local and regional railroad operations were brought under the umbrella of a handful of large railroad enterprises; coordination of rail services, it was hoped, could provide competitive efficiencies. This was reinforced by what we would think of today as "branding." From the uniforms worn by the railroad's personnel to the paint colors used

Philadelphia & Reading Engines
BURN HARD COAL
NO SMOKE

on its stations, the Reading Railroad had a distinct identity. Speed of trains, reasonable fares, smoothness of ride, ease of connections—even the type of fuel used—were cited to distinguish one railroad from another.

Communities along the Philadelphia and Reading grew as the railroad transformed rural life. Businesses took advantage of the rail service to ship goods to market, and by the turn of the 20th century, it was common for speculators and developers to buy and subdivide land in the communities along the route. New advertising strategies were used, including providing free tickets to Philadelphians to entice them out along the Reading to consider buying a building lot or a newly-constructed home. The Philadelphia and Reading saw the advantage in this, and produced its own promotional literature, lauding the benefits to be found at various stops along its lines:

The Philadelphia & Reading Railway traverses the Land of Plenty, and its "Pleasant Places" are found everywhere within the regions it reaches. All of these are accessible at a small cost, and a large proportion of them are available for the families of busy men who must be in town every day. An effort is made in the following pages to mention, however briefly, all of the desirable summering points along the main line and branches of this company. Correspondence with any of the parties named herein, with a preliminary visit, if possible, will undoubtedly lead to a pleasant refuge during the heated months.

Facilities for the varied pleasures of country life, including driving over the usually fine roads of Eastern Pennsylvania, are generally ample. Special mention is made this season of cycling excursions, which may be made from all of the [listed] places.

From *Pleasant Places on the Philadelphia & Reading Railway, 1901*

North Wales, of course, was included in this publication: "There is much in this handsome little town and its surroundings to commend it to those in quest of rest and pleasure. It has the advantages of quiet rural life combined with most city conveniences."

