All Aboard the Perkiomen Railroad

The Perkiomen Railroad was formally established on March 23, 1865. Two years later, it was leased to the Philadelphia & Reading (P&R) Railroad, founded in 1833 as one of the first railroads in the United States.

The Perkiomen Railroad was 38.5 miles long and contained 28 stops at the height of its operations, serving locals and tourists for 100 years. The Railroad followed the Perkiomen Creek for the majority of its route, starting at Perkiomen Junction near Valley Forge and continued north through Oaks, Collegeville, Schwenksville, Salford, Green Lane, Pennsburg, Hosensack, and Dillinger, before ending at Emmaus Junction, with connections to Allentown or Reading.

Highlighting all stops, the exhibition is laid out along the route, with each station and the year it was built included like a timeline.
A new and popular route around 1900, Philadelphians left the busy city on the Railroad for swimming, boating, fishing, and more in the small towns along the route. Books and articles from 1901 and 1912 mention how wonderful the Perkiomen Creek and its surrounding towns were for relaxing over the summer:

“The Perkiomen Creek and Valley are famed for their romantic beauty and the numerous pretty villages and hamlets that lie along the line of this road have long been popular as places of summer residence. There is excellent fishing and boating all along the creek, and some of its localities are widely celebrated among anglers. Trains run to and from the Reading Terminal.”
-Pleasant Places on the Philadelphia & Reading Railroad, 1901

But the Perkiomen Railroad didn’t solely run passenger trains. Freight carrying milk, food goods, ice, cigars, and brooms from factories and farms grew regional commerce, supporting the growth of towns into what exists today. Postcards, photographs, and freight car tickets line the gallery, offering a glimpse back to early 1900s operations.

“The first telephone in Schwenksville was a private line between the Item office and what is now Farrington’s hotel... Travelers would gather and discuss the news of the day and Mr. Grubb had only to wind his phone to find out what was happening.”
-The Schwenksville Item 75th Anniversary Edition, 1954

However, not all stations or even the towns they were named after still exist. After World War II, there were a lot of changes in the railroad companies. In 1945, the Perkiomen Railroad Company and the Reading Company (formerly Philadelphia & Reading Railroad Company) merged. A decade later, the last regularly scheduled passenger train rolled through the Perkiomen Valley; the rising popularity of automobiles made passenger trains unprofitable, but the line continued to ship freight. With Conrail taking control in 1976, Anthracite taking over in 1983, and Blue Mountain Reading taking over in 1989, the only original remaining rail between
Pennsburg and Emmaus has been used by East Penn Railroad since 1995. Very few of the original stations are known to exist, most being businesses or private homes today.

This exhibition is created in collaboration with the Perkiomen Railroad Historical Society (PRHS), and displays never-before-seen objects from their collection; “All Aboard the Perkiomen Railroad” would not be possible without them. The photographs in this article include items on display from the PRHS.

Running May 1, 2024 through January 12, 2025, this exhibition is included in every house tour, and is free to the public.

The 1950s saw the end of passenger cars on the Perkiomen Railroad. This photo is from July 1955's “Last Ride on the Perk”.

**Revolutionary War Weekend Sneak Peek**

Our Revolutionary War Weekend will take place on Saturday, May 18th (10am-5pm) and Sunday, May 19th (10am-4pm). We’re excited to share our unique history with the public at our second annual Revolutionary War reenactment. Here are just some of the things you can look forward to at our event:

**The Regimental Brewmeister**

The Regimental Brewmeister will present a living history demonstration of brewing beer using 18th Century methods. Visit him to learn about the importance of beer, the methods of brewing, and try out a sample of his brew!

**The American War of Independence Privateer Museum**

The AWI Privateer Museum includes interactive displays and historical interpreters that tell the story and history of Privateersmen. Audience participation is encouraged!

**4th Light Dragoons Moylan’s Horse**

Reenactors will portray “Dragoons,” or cavalry. Visitors will see mounted Dragoons demonstrate drills.
Mike Harris
Saturday, May 18th at 11:30 a.m.
In his presentation, local author, Mr. Harris will provide an overview of the movements and history of the 1777 Philadelphia campaign. Michael C. Harris is a graduate of the University of Mary Washington and the American Military University. His first book, Brandywine, was awarded the The American Revolution Round Table of Richmond book award in 2014.

Dr. Emily Sneff
Sunday, May 19th at 11:15 a.m.
Dr. Emily Sneff is an early American historian and a leading expert on the United States' Declaration of Independence. Dr. Sneff will present “When the Declaration of Independence was News to the Continental Army.” In July 1776, the Continental Congress declared independence from Great Britain. But it was up to the Continental Army to secure that independence. Dr. Sneff will explore when and how soldiers and officers, including General George Washington, learned about the Declaration of Independence, and how they reacted to the news.

Music with Charlie Zahm
Sunday, May 19th at various times
Charlie Zahm brings the Spirit of the American Revolution and the drama of the age to an audience like few musicians can. He will sing the glories of gallant General Washington, an ode to the great new ideal of “Liberty,” songs of battles won or lost, and popular selections of the times. Charlie calls on a robust baritone, mastery of guitar (and other instruments), and a seasoned approach to the art of “entertaining” to provide a program enjoyed by all.

Featured food and beer vendors:

For more information and a full schedule of events, visit:
https://www.montgomerycountypa.gov/4333/Revolutionary-War-Reenactment
Upcoming Events

Music of the Underground Railroad!
Sat., June 8th at 4:00pm

Musician and historian, Joe Becton will present the music and times of the Underground Railroad's resistance to slavery. Joe will play guitar, harmonica, and sing. The audience will experience musical traditions from Hambone to John Browns Body as the songs tell the story of the Underground's transportation, political manipulations and the war that finally ends slavery in America. This performance will take place on the mansion porch. Please bring a chair or blanket to sit on. All ages welcome at this FREE performance!

Pollinator Party
Sat., June 15th 10:00am- 3:00pm

The Friends of Pennypacker Mills, in collaboration with the Penn State Extension Master Gardeners, are hosting a Pollinator Party to kick off World Pollinator Week! The event will feature speakers, tree walks, activities for kids, craft vendors, and much more! For more details, visit https://www.friendsppm.org/pollinator-party.html All ages are welcome at this FREE event!

All Aboard!
Sat., June 22nd 10:00am- 3:00pm

Spend the day learning all about the Perkiomen Railroad! The whole family can enjoy model train displays, a parade locomotive, and a ride-on scale train. Matthew Dodd will perform his Music of the Railroad. Speakers will present on the Perkiomen Railroad (limited seating- please call to reserve your spot). Stop in the mansion to see our new exhibit in partnership with the Perkiomen Railroad Historical Society. All ages welcome at this FREE event!

All events sponsored in part by the Friends of Pennypacker Mills.
Our Museum Shop has moved into a new space! Check out the new products in the shop, including Oliver and Pluff Tea, Colonial Beer Brewing Kits, hand-made ornaments from the UK, and much more!

In coordination with our new exhibit, we have a featured display of train related items, including exclusive merchandise from the Perkiomen Railroad Historical Society.

You can visit the Museum Shop during our open hours, Tuesday-Saturday 10am-4pm and Sunday 1pm-4pm.

Our StoryWalk is up for the Season

Our first StoryWalk story of 2024 is up! This year our StoryWalk will feature four books: A More Perfect Union (April-May), My First Book of Trains (June-July), Brave Clara Barton (August-September), and Halloween is Coming! (October).

Our first book, A More Perfect Union, tells the unforgettable story of fifty-five Americans and the Constitution they created in 1787 to give the struggling new government a foundation. This book features beautiful illustrations and accurate historical information.

The StoryWalk starts at the main gate and continues along the driveway at Pennypacker Mills. It is a great way for beginner readers to practice their reading while getting some exercise!