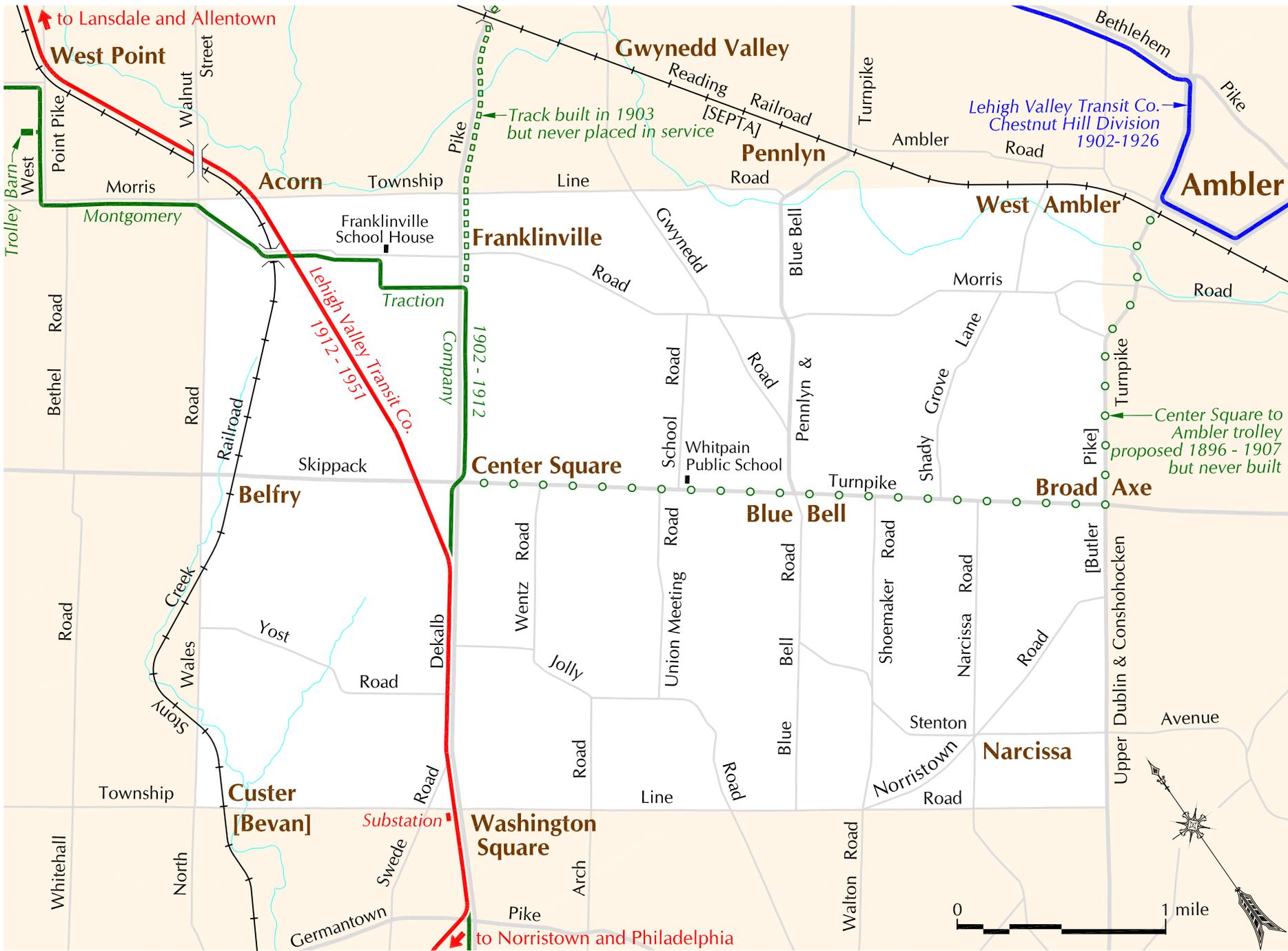




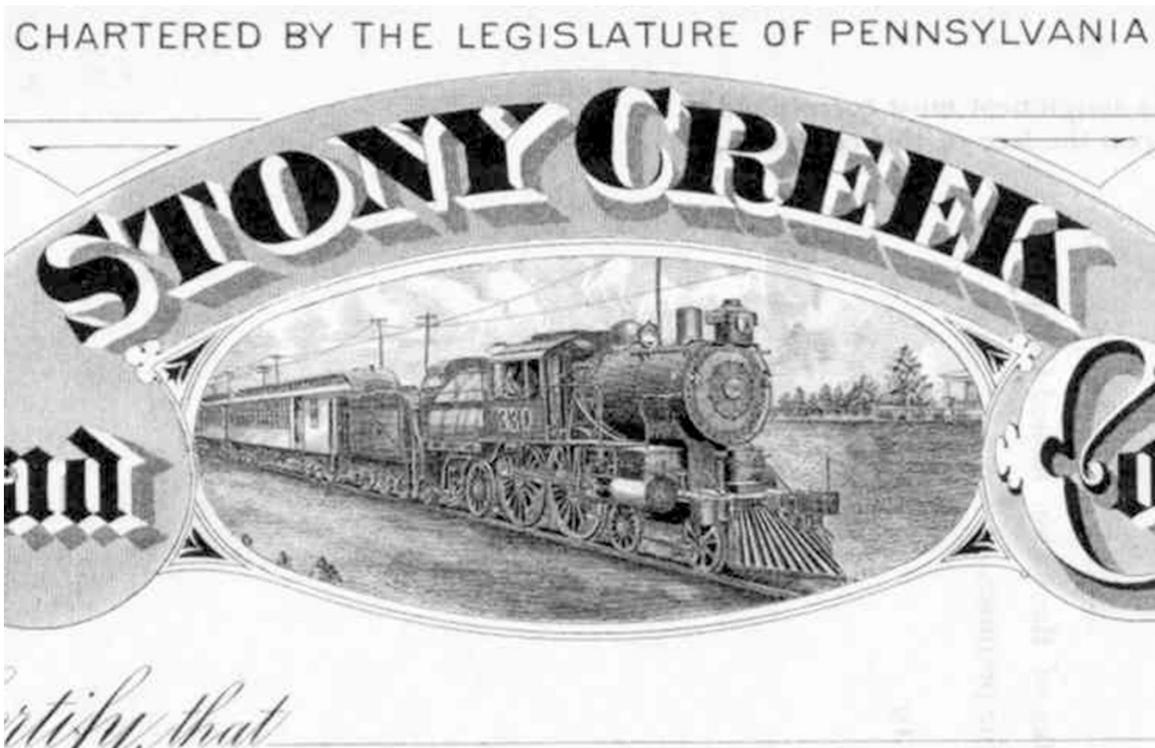
**A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE
LEHIGH VALLEY TRANSIT CO. LIBERTY BELL ROUTE
IN WHITPAIN TOWNSHIP, MONTGOMERY CO., PENNA.
WHITPAIN'S HIGH SPEED RAIL**

BY MIKE SZILAGYI WITH ANDREW W. MAGINNIS

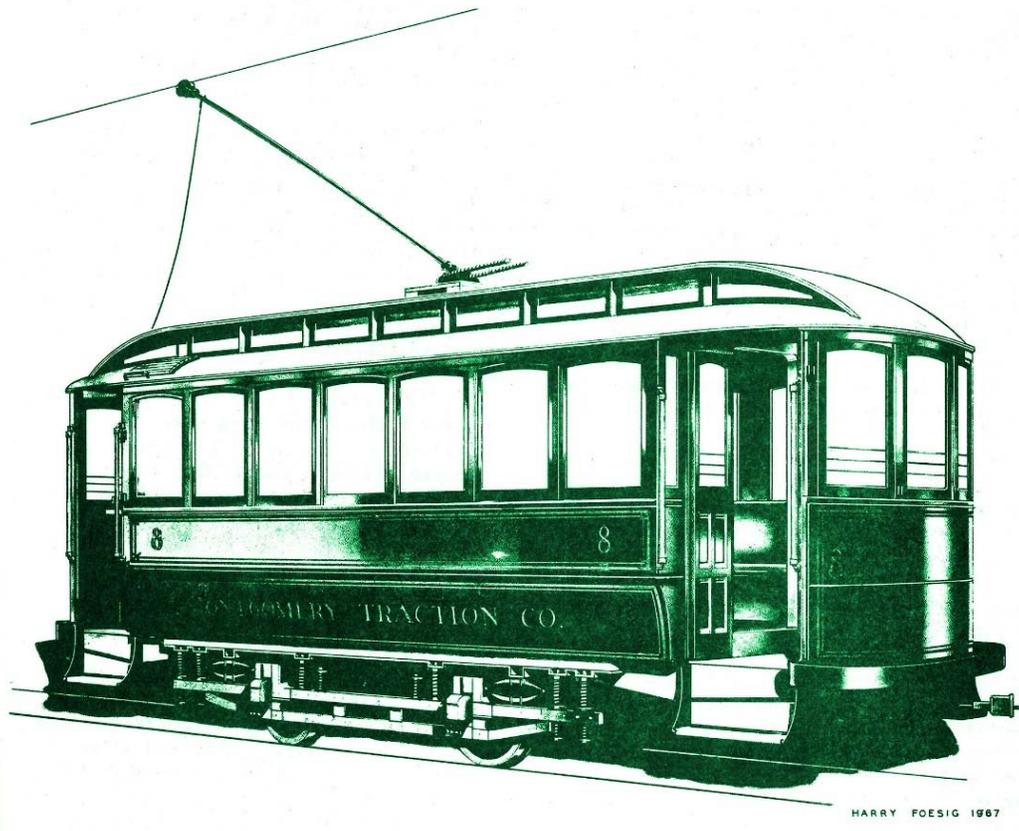


Trolley Map of Whitpain Township
 Montgomery County Pennsylvania

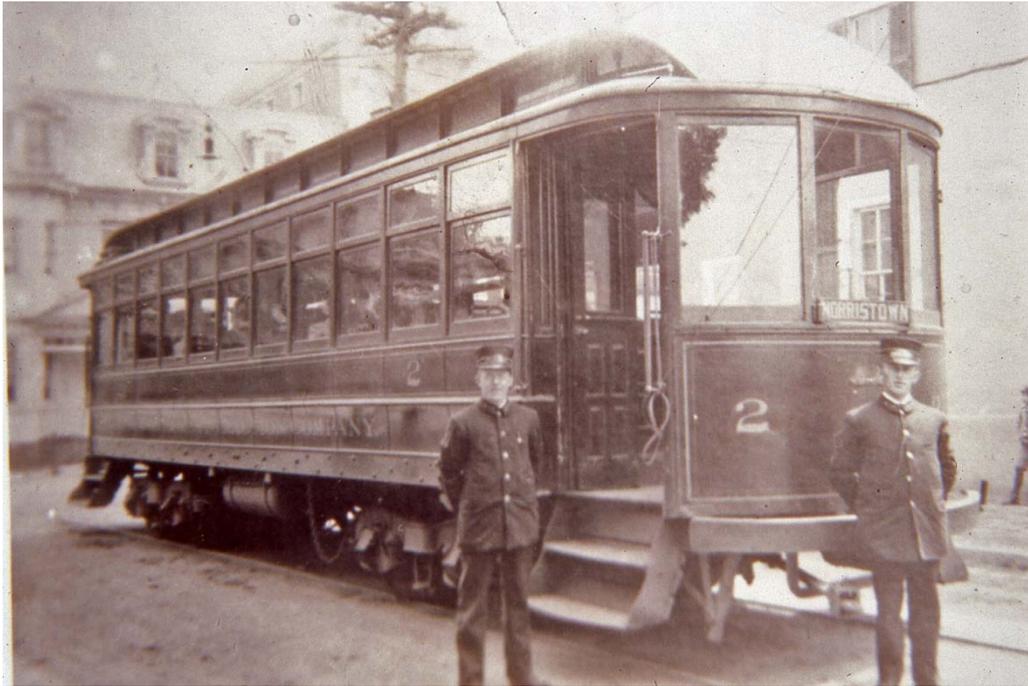
Mike Szilagyi cartography 2017



The first railroad in Whitpain Township was the Stony Creek Railroad, built in the 1870s. Stations (from north to south) were at Acorn, Belfry (Skippack Pike) and Custer (Township Line Road). Both freight and passengers were carried, but the steam-hauled trains were infrequent and tickets expensive.



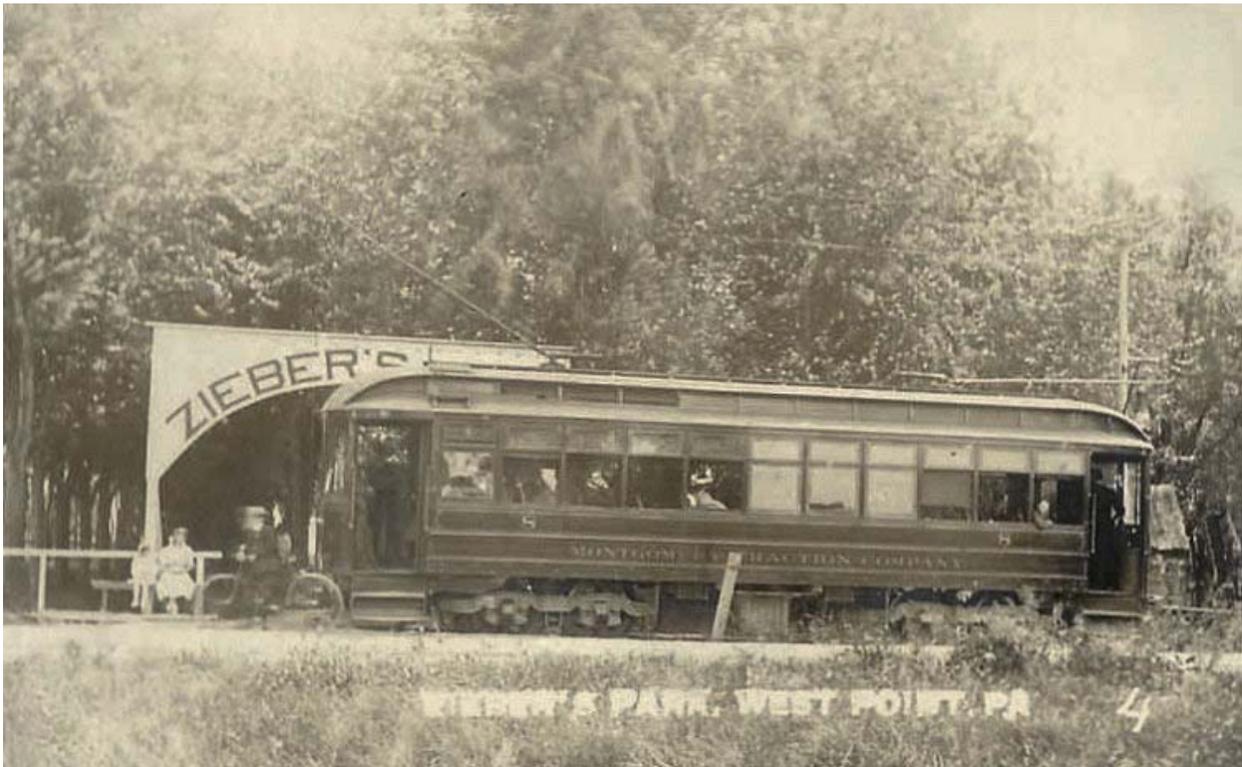
Whitpain's first trolley line: the Lansdale & Norristown Electric Railway Company, incorporated in 1900. After two years of construction, trolley service began in 1902, running along Morris Road and Dekalb Pike.



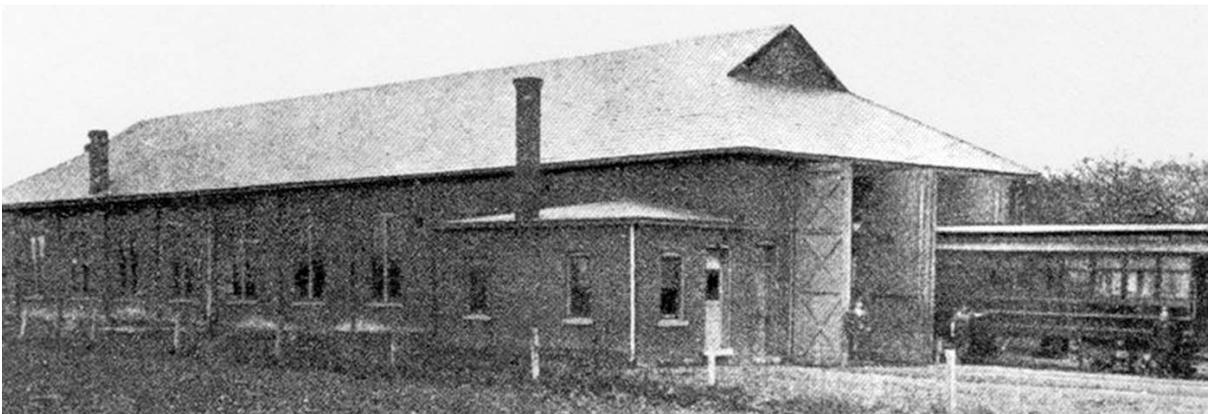
After reorganization in 1904, the trolley line was known as the Montgomery Traction Company. Proud crewmen are about to depart the line's Lansdale terminus on Susquehanna Avenue at Main Street. Here transfers were made to Lehigh Valley Transit trolleys to Hatfield and Allentown, Ambler and Chestnut Hill.



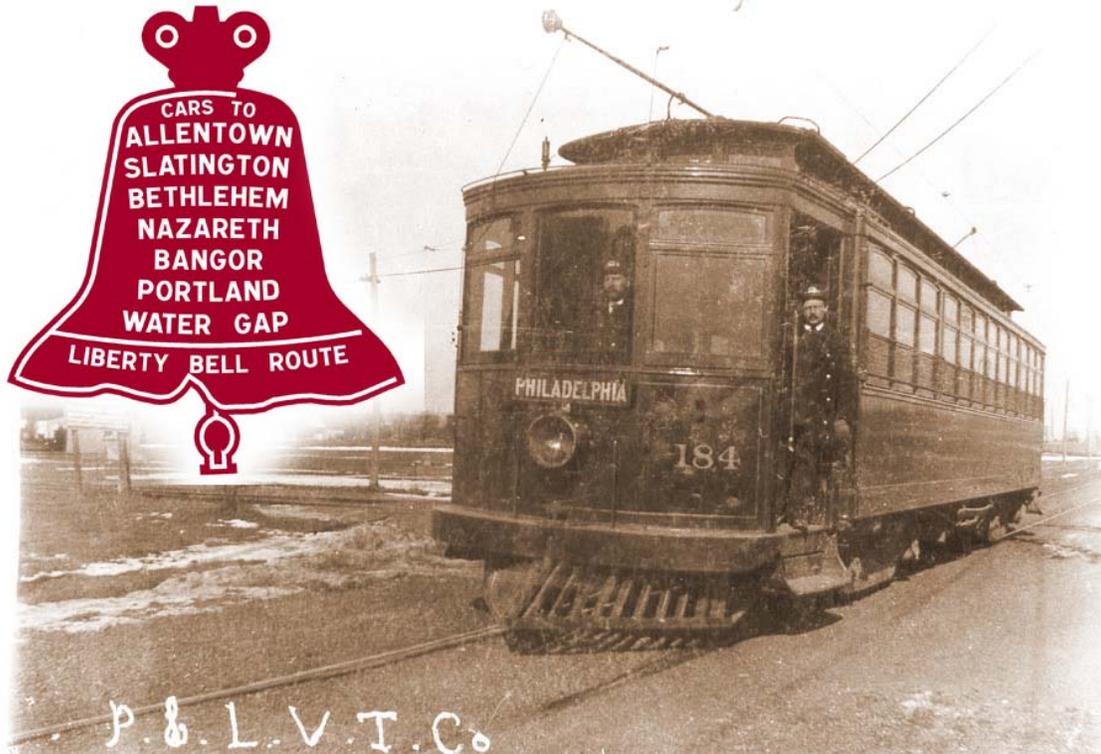
At its south end in Norristown, the MTCO. connected with Schuylkill Valley Traction trolleys. (Later, SVT would be absorbed by Reading Transit & Light Co., with trolleys to Manayunk, Conshohocken, Pottstown, and Boyertown.) This tinted postcard shows an MTCO. trolley southbound on Dekalb Street at Airy Street.



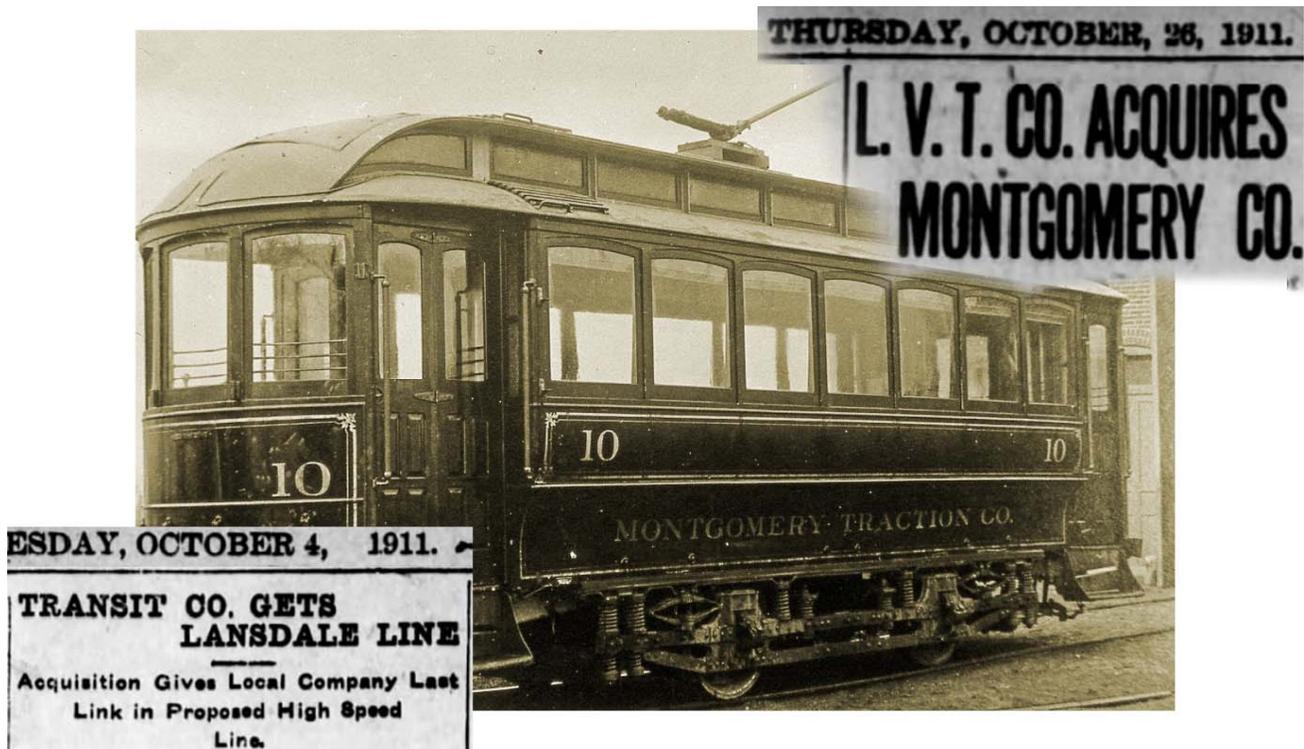
MTCO. trolleys served Zieber's Park on Garfield Avenue, later known as West Point Park.



The trolley car barn still stands today on West Point Pike in Upper Gwynedd Township. (MTCO's brick power generating station on nearby Cottage Avenue was torn down in 2016.)



Lehigh Valley Transit trolleys served Chestnut Hill Philadelphia, Allentown, and points in between. Near Whitpain, the original Liberty Bell Route ran on Bethlehem Pike, Sunnyside Pike, Allentown Road. By 1910 the frequent, low-cost service was popular. However, through service was slow: three hours.



LVT directors knew that the Liberty Bell Route needed a new, more direct line to provide faster service. It was decided to purchase the Montgomery Traction Company and integrate it into the LVT system. One 1911 headline reads: “Acquisition Gives Local Company Last Link in Proposed High Speed Line.”



On December 12, 1912 (12-12-12) the new high speed Liberty Bell Route opened to the public. Most of the original, meandering Montgomery Traction Company line was bypassed and abandoned. However, one-and-a-half miles in the shoulder of Dekalb Pike in Whippen and East Norriton were retained.



“Finest Electric Trains In The World” was no idle boast. Passenger accommodations were superb. The new fleet of heavy railroad-style trolleys weighed in at 80,000 lbs (40 tons) each and had a top speed of 60 mph. In 1912, “mile a minute” speed was no mean feat.



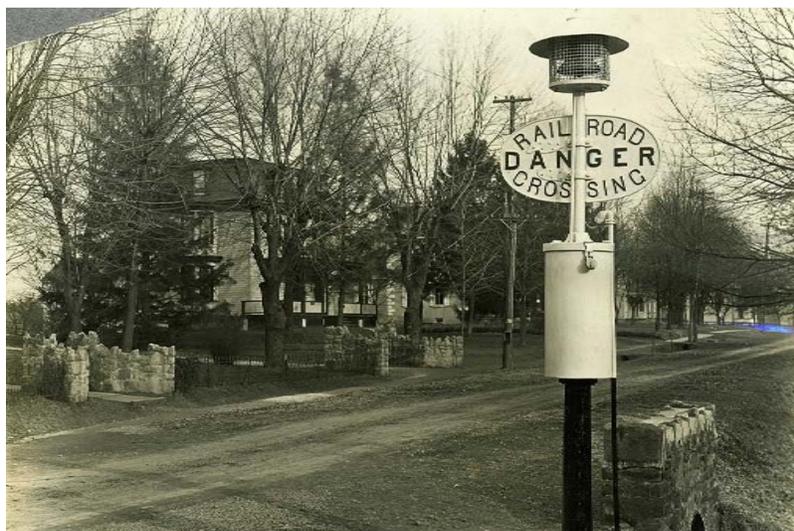
Flagmen were hired to warn road users of the approach of the new, faster trolley cars. This view looks southeast on Township Line Road from its intersection with Dekalb Pike.



This is the same location as it appears today. The site of the historic tavern known in later years as Mr. Ron's, demolished to make way for a CVS pharmacy, is behind and to the left of this vantage point.



The 1912 high-speed alignment slashed railroad-style across open fields. Convenient stations were established at points where the trolley line crossed roads. This is Center Square station. The photographer is standing on Skippack Pike, looking south. In the distance, at what was known as Chalk's Hill, the tracks curved to run alongside Dekalb Pike.



This is the sign and warning bell at the LVT crossing on Skippack Pike. The view is looking south-east. With no crossing gates, serious collisions with automobiles were, unfortunately, a common occurrence.



In 1939, a fleet of modern high-speed trolleys was acquired second-hand from Ohio. These lightweight cars were capable of speeds well in excess of 80 mph. This one's crossing Township Line Road from Upper Gwynedd into Whitpain at what is today Audubon Drive.



Not all the old trolleys were retired when the new fleet arrived. This southbound 1916 trolley has just crossed Township Line Road in 1944.
C. A. Brown photo



This southbound trolley waits at Acorn Siding, between Township Line Road and Morris Road. Passing sidings such as this were essential on what was for most of its length a single-track line.



This northbound trolley accelerates away from Normandy Farms station at Morris Road.
J. P. Shuman photo



This southbound trolley is about to cross Cherry Road, leaning into the curve to Dekalb Pike. The houses still stand along Fairview Avenue. This location was known as Chalk's Hill.



Southbound LVT no. 812 approaches Cherry Road at the point where the high-speed line curved to run in the shoulder of Dekalb Pike. The date is February 22, 1947.

C. A. Brown photo



This northbound trolley follows the curve away from Dekalb Pike onto private right-of-way. The trolley is about to cross Cherry Road. The next street running will be on S. Broad Street in Lansdale. October 1950 photo by Dave Cope



Northbound maintenance trolley fitted with a plow clears drifting snow from the track. The location is Dekalb Pike at Cherry Road.



Freight continued to be an important component of LVT's business right up until the end of trolley service. This southbound trolley freight car is on Dekalb Pike south of Center Square in November 1949. The mailboxes on the right are for residences on Michael's Lane. Today 202 Rent-All occupies the roadside behind the photographer.



This electrical substation built as part of the 1912 upgrade still stands today at the corner of Dekalb Pike and Township Line Road in East Norriton Township.

Conshohocken Recorder.



BY
IDAY

CONSHOHOCKEN, PA., FRIDAY, JULY 10, 1942

PRICE: TWO CENTS

Local Men Accepted for Army Service

Board No. 5, sent 112 for Army examination 51 accepted by Army.

4-DAY FURLOUGH

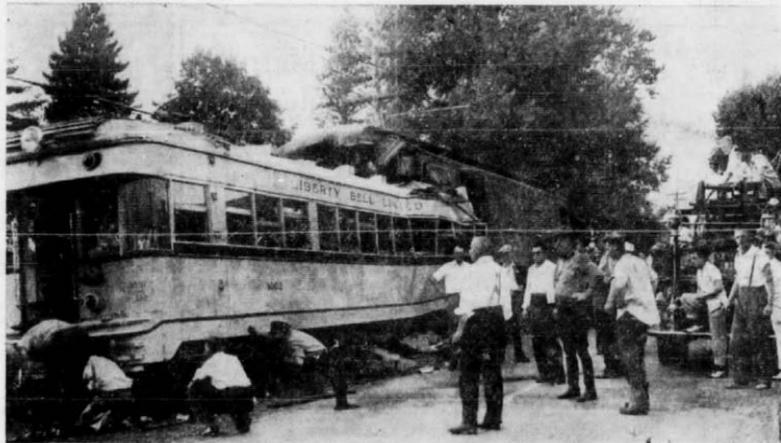
sted ones given fur-
is—L. A. Talone first
al attorney to enter

by two more Conshohocken
ave been accepted for service
U. S. Army, through local
board. Area 5
men were part of a contin-
f 112 from Draft Board Area
ished by the local board,
sday, leaving early in the
g by train from Ambler,
arriers of Area 5. Of the 112
s Philadelphia, only 51 were
el. Conshohocken men num-
2 of this 51.

men were permitted a four-
y furlough, to terminate
at home, and most of them
back to Conshohocken Wed-
night. They will leave
in two weeks from Ambler,
cepted, this time to be sent
receiving station and then to
g camps.

local men accepted include
d A. Talone, attorney, solici-

Removing Victims from Wrecked Passenger Car



—Courtesy of Eve Bulletin, Phila.

11 Die, 21 Hurt In Head-on Train Crash

L. V. T. Co. limited to Allen-
town in head-on-crash
with freight at Wash. Sq.

CRUSHED IN SEATS

Army convoy, Civilian De-
fense Units take vic-
tims from car

A head-on trolley crash cost the
lives of eleven persons Wednesday
afternoon at Washington Square
Gardens, and in addition there are
21 others in Montgomery and Sac-
red Heart Hospitals, Norristown.
Three of the injured are reported
to be in critical condition.

The crash was between the first
section of the "Liberty Bell Limited"
enroute from Norristown in
Ennals, above Allentown, and a
heavily loaded freight trolley.

Failure of the motorman of the
passenger car to obey an order of
his dispatcher at Lansdale was
given as the cause of the crash this
morning as authorities continued
their probe into the tragedy.

This motorman, Harry H. Strunk,
28, Allentown, died two hours at-

Local Unit Aids at Wreck

808 Gas Ration Cards Issued in Both Boros
Registration for permanent gas

Asks Change in Defense Head

Mother of Local Resident Is Victim
Mrs. Martha Frederick Ander-

The worst collision on the LVT system occurred on July 8, 1942 when a northbound limited car crashed head-on into a southbound freight on Dekalb Pike between Township Line Road and Germantown Pike.



Eleven passengers and the trolley motorman were killed. The tragedy was attributed to human error.



This October 1942 photo captures a southbound Liberty Bell Limited trolley curving from Dekalb Pike about to cross Germantown Pike at what was called Matthias's Meadow (unrecognizable today).



On Swede Street at the county courthouse in Norristown, LVT trolleys rolled up the ramp onto the P&W viaduct to continue the high-speed run to 69th Street Upper Darby, just outside the Philadelphia city limits.
1950 photo by Dave Cope



www.thetrolleydodger.com

Last run. With no advance notice, on September 6, 1951 Lehigh Valley Transit Co. announced the end of trolley service on the Allentown to Philadelphia division. Passengers arrived at stations the next morning only to learn the disappointing news. LVT attempted substituting bus service over nearby roads but the slow indirect route was not a viable option for commuters and the buses were withdrawn in 1956.



Historian, author and artist Harry Foesig (1897-2003) with one of his exquisite illustrations (see page 1)

Many thanks to noted transit historian Andrew W. Maginnis who kindly made available his firsthand knowledge of the line and his extensive collection of historic photographs, and to Steve Moyer of Lansdale Historical Society for his generosity in sharing a trove of hundreds more historic photos.

In the mid 1960s Mr. Maginnis and the late Harry Foesig of North Wales collaborated on Mr. Foesig's authoritative book *Trolleys of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania*, still the best source of information on the 140-mile network of electric trolley lines that once served the county.

Thanks too are owed Ken Corti of Whitpain Township Planning Commission for encouraging me to undertake this project.