

SOCIETY FOR COMMERCIAL ARCHEOLOGY'S
Pennsylvania Blobfest Roadtrip
JULY 13-15, 2018 KEVIN PATRICK



The End
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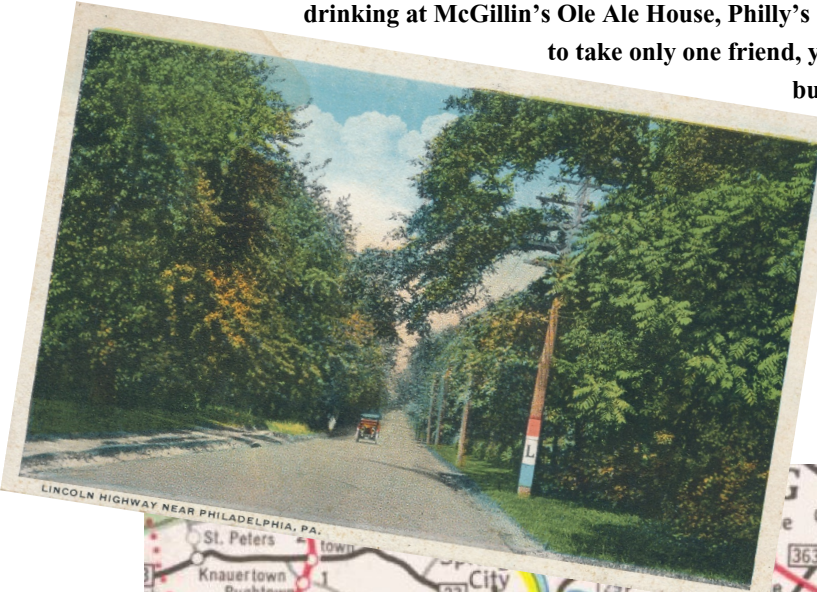


**Phoenixville's Blobfest
Haines Shoe House — Philadelphia**

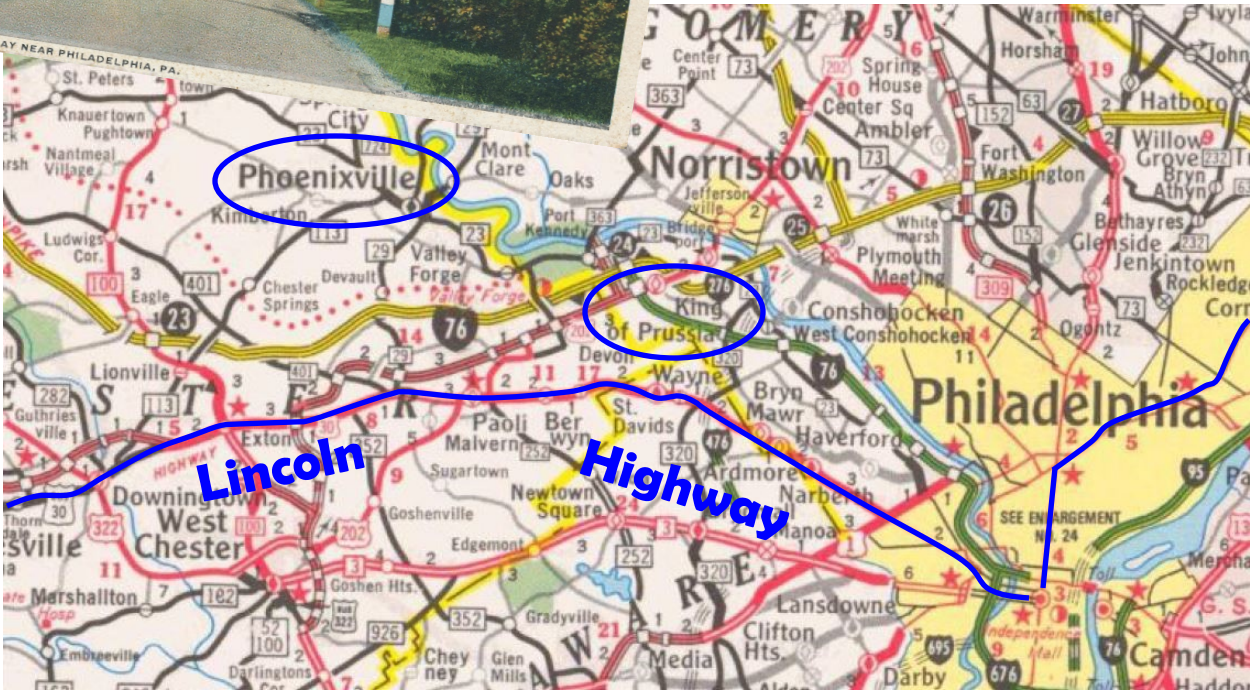


SCA TAKES THE LINCOLN HIGHWAY TO BLOBFEST BY WAY OF THE HAINES SHOE HOUSE AND A NEON-LIT PHILADELPHIA

This is like the great American road trip you took when you were a kid –only better! Instead of sitting in grandma’s house for hour upon tedious hour, we’re going to all the places your dad would have said ‘no’ to like, Blobfest. And that giant Shoe House you always wanted to see, but your parents objected because its 100 miles out of the way? We’re doing that too. And when we come upon a giant roadside windmill filled with ‘Amish Stuff’ that there is no time to stop at, we’re stopping anyway. Then, when we finally get to Philadelphia we won’t be standing in the hot summer sun waiting to tour Independence Hall, or listening to some old lady dressed up like Betsy Ross. We’ll be roaming the streets looking for neon, eating Reading Terminal Market cheesesteaks and Pop’s water ice, visiting Termini Brothers’ classic Italian bakery, and then we’ll go drinking at McGillin’s Ole Ale House, Philly’s oldest bar. And instead of being able to take only one friend, you’ll be able to take all of them. So, buckle up –oh wait, in our luxury motor coach you won’t even have to do that.



Columbia’s 1928 Lincoln Highway marker (right); and a long-gone pole-painted LH marker in Philadelphia’s Main Line suburbs (left).



DUTCH HAVEN, RONKS, PA

Just when tourists start to get the idea that the Pennsylvania Dutch are really German, not Dutch, they came upon a giant roadside windmill with twirling blades like you would find in Holland. Dutch Haven is a classic roadside attraction built as a restaurant and gift shop (without blades) in 1946 when many roadside businesses caught the attention of passing motorists with a faux windmill. Operating on Lancaster County’s busy Lincoln Highway East, the Dutch Haven has always been a favorite tourist stop. The restaurant is closed, but the windmill is chock full of Amish Stuff, and still sells its own baked goods, soft pretzels and root beer. And everyone walking through the door gets a free sample of their famous shoofly pie.





HAINES SHOE HOUSE, HELLAM TWP., PA

Mahlon Haines was the self-proclaimed “Shoe Wizard” of York, PA, operating 50 shoe stores in towns throughout Pennsylvania and Maryland by 1948 when he constructed his famous Shoe House as an advertising gimmick. The 5-story house with little shoe dog house was rented out to couples on vacation, and was the focus of several promotions, including one where recently married employees could honeymoon for a week at the Shoe House free of charge with butler and maid service. Haines built the cottage across the street for himself and his second wife, and in 1952, ten years before his death, he gave the Shoe House to his employees. The Shoe House was subsequently sold several times and is currently being operated along with the ice cream parlor by Jeff and Melanie Schmuck.



Blobfest!

The 1958 horror movie, *The Blob*, is as much a Philly-area product as Ben Franklin, soft pretzels and hoagies. The movie was produced at Valley Forge Film Studios in Chester Springs, PA, used plenty of local talent, and was filmed on-location at Phoenixville’s Colonial Theater, a supermarket in Royersford, and the Downingtown Diner. The Blob itself (a silicone mass made by Union Carbide in Sistersville, WV) still resides here, safely contained in its original shipping bucket under the watchful eye of its owner Wes Shank (author of *From Silicone to the Silver Screen: Memoirs of The Blob*).



The Blob devours the Downingtown Diner in this 1958 album cover featuring The Blob theme song with music composed by then unknown and uncredited Burt Bacharach. (above)

Wes Shank at Phoenixville’s Blobfest showing off the uncontested star of the show, the one and only Blob. (left)

Harry Brownback built Phoenixville’s Beaux Arts styled Colonial Opera House for live-entertainment and silent movies in 1903. The theater was purchased by George Silverman in the early 1950s, modernized with yellow porcelain enamel panels and a neon marquee, and “healthfully Air Conditioned.” Surviving its 1958 attack by *The Blob*, the façade was later ravaged with a brick remodel that was there when the theater closed in 1995. Purchased by the Phoenixville Area Economic Development Corp., the theater was restored to its Blobolicious greatness in 2002, having already become the center of Blobfest since the festival’s 1999 inception.



LINKED TO THE BLOB

One of many low-budget science fiction movies made in the 1950s, *The Blob* –just like the gelatinous monster in the movie– never really died, and will forever be associated with certain people, places and businesses. Phoenixville, which has now hosted Blobfest for nearly 20 years, had its origins in Pennsylvania’s iron & steel industrial age. A nail factory founded in 1790 became Phoenix Steel (and its Phoenix Bridge subsidiary, 1862-1962), which finally closed in 1987, putting the old mill town in an economic tailspin. As the surrounding farms sprouted wealthy suburbs, gentrification in Phoenixville has literally remade the town from its own post-industrial ashes. Some of the wardrobe worn in *The Blob* was purchased in Phoenixville stores that have since become boutiques shops and microbreweries.



Attacked by the Blob in the movie’s climax, the movie Downingtown Diner (above) was a late-1940s Silk City built by the Paterson Vehicle Company in Paterson, NJ. It was replaced by a 1966 Silk City that sits on the same foundation (below).



Four years before Olin Howland played *The Blob*’s first victim, he was the alcoholic in *Them* no one believed when he said he saw giant ants in the sewers of Los Angeles. Dead at 73 in 1959, *The Blob* was his last roll.



Steve McQueen was 27 when he landed his first leading roll in *The Blob* as teenage Steve Andrews. Wes Shank writes that he and his unruly German shepherd were a handful on the set. As his stardom grew, he came to be embarrassed by the movie, but when he died of cancer in 1980, A *Blob* movie poster was on his wall.

ROADSIDE DELIGHTS IN COLUMBIA, PA

What started as Hinkle’s Pharmacy in 1893 is now Hinkle’s Restaurant (1), preserving the old drug store lunch counter. The building’s first floor façade was modernized with mosaic tiles in the 1950s that includes and orange backdropped chemistry lab of pharmaceutical apparatuses (2). The Lazy K Lounge on Locust Street is now closed, but the vertically mounted wall sign still beckons from the building (3). A 1955 Kullman operates as the Prospect Diner on a triangle made by two different generations of the Lincoln Highway just east of Columbia (4).





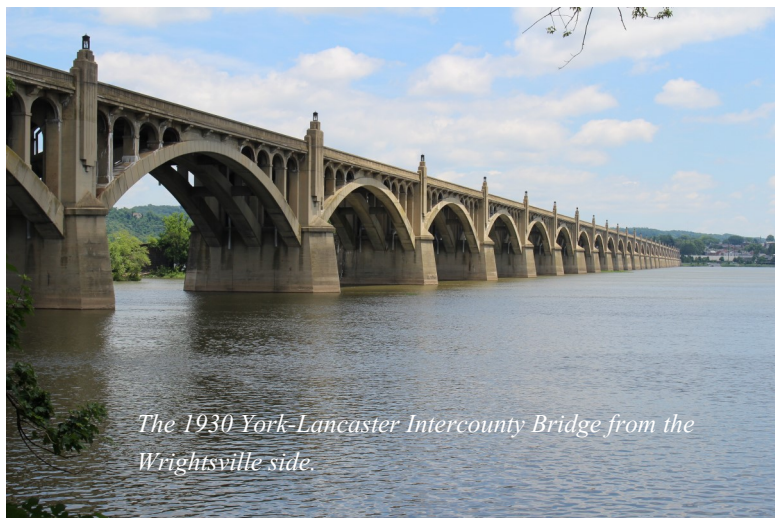
Lincoln Highway traffic was pulled from the 1897 Pennsylvania Railroad Bridge (left) when the York-Lancaster Intercounty Bridge (right) opened in 1930. The railroad bridge was dismantled in the 1960s.



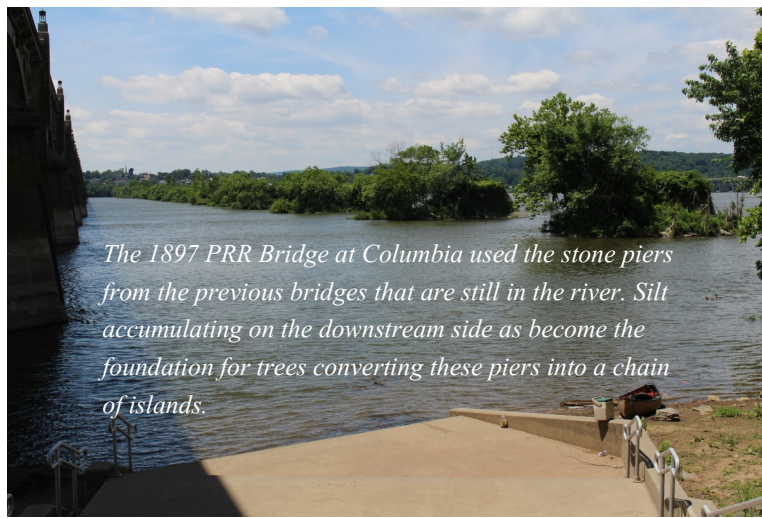
From 1913 until 1930 Lincoln Highway traffic on what was then the busiest trans-continental road in the country shared the narrow Columbia-Wrightsville Bridge with PRR trains. Traffic was stopped at both ends anytime a train was crossing the bridge.

COLUMBIA CROSSING

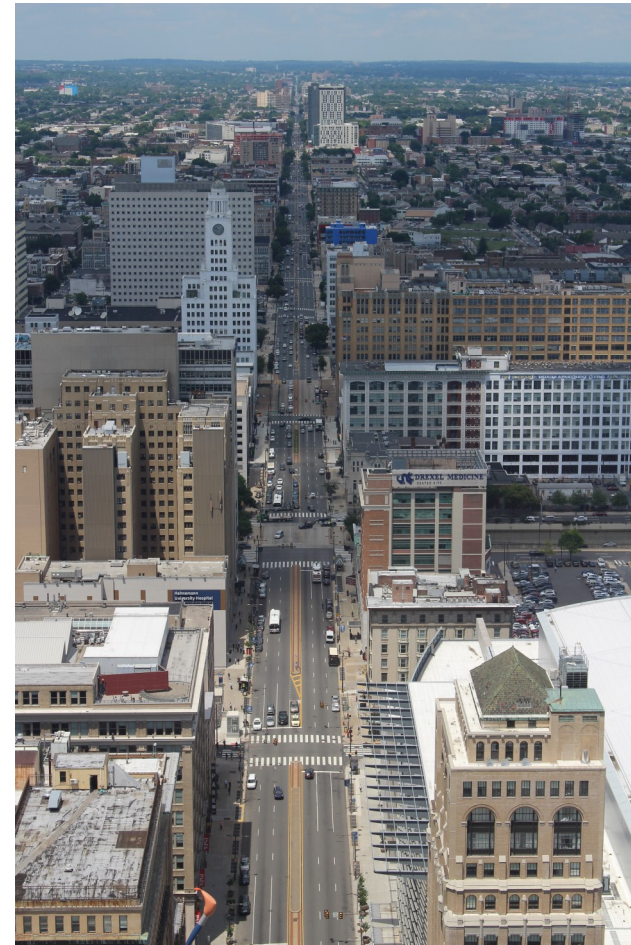
Despite the mile-wide expanse of water, the Susquehanna River at Columbia, PA, as been an important crossing point since the 18th century. Originally operated as Wright's Ferry, a covered bridge was built here as early as 1812, replaced in 1832. That bridge was burned by Union troops in 1863 to prevent General Lee's Confederates from crossing the river prior to the battle of Gettysburg. The replacement to that bridge was destroyed in a windstorm in 1896, and replaced by a steel through truss built by the Pennsylvania Railroad. When the Lincoln Highway was routed through Columbia in 1913 it shared the deck with the railroad tracks until the reinforced concrete multiple arch Intercounty Bridge was completed in 1930. Route 30 was relocated to the dual lane Wrights Ferry Bridge just upstream in 1972. In addition to the bridges, Columbia was where the 1830s Pennsylvania Main Line of Public Works' Philadelphia & Columbia Railroad interfaced with its Eastern Division Canal north to Harrisburg, and west along the Juniata. Across the river, the Susquehanna & Tidewater Canal opened in 1840 from Wrightsville south to the Chesapeake Bay and Baltimore.



The 1930 York-Lancaster Intercounty Bridge from the Wrightsville side.

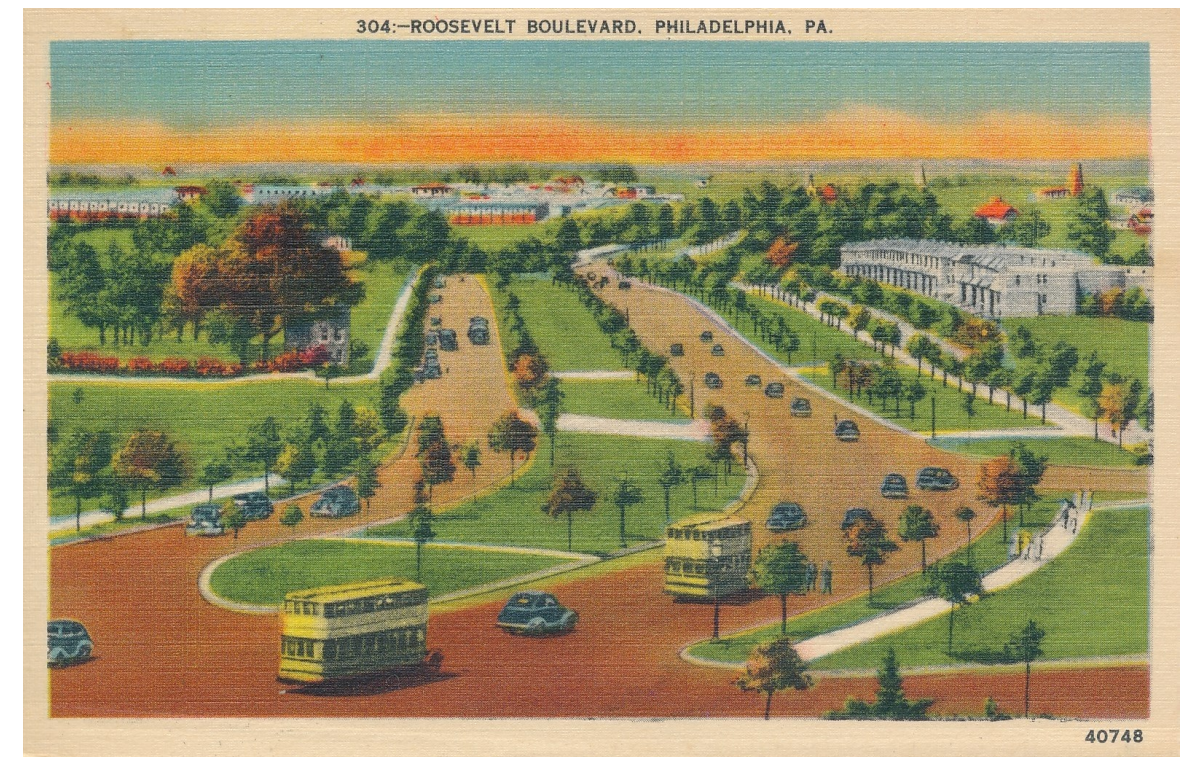


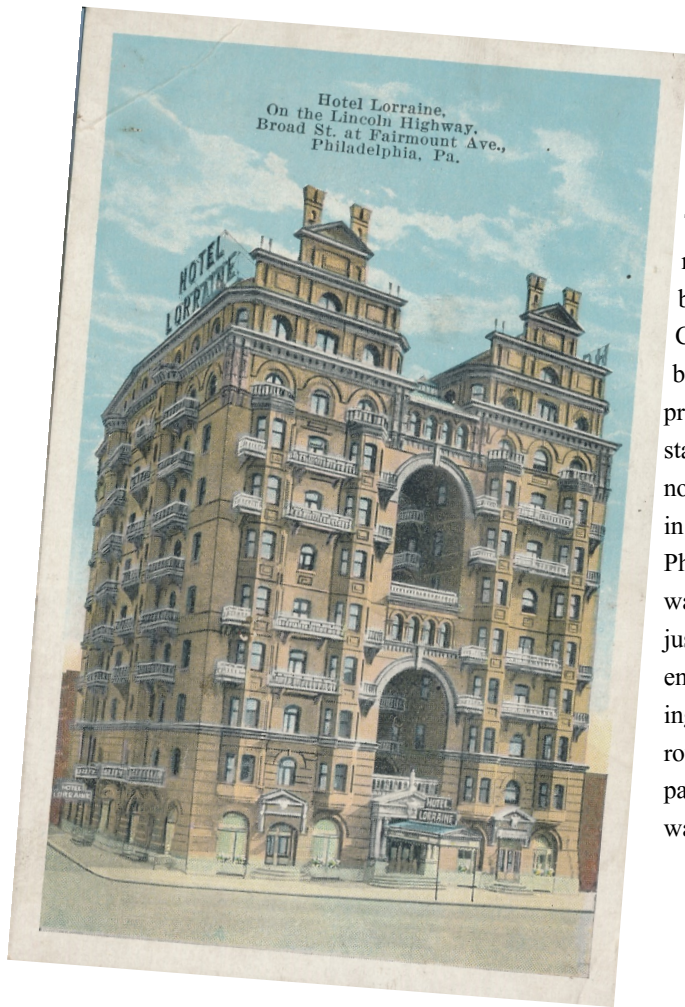
The 1897 PRR Bridge at Columbia used the stone piers from the previous bridges that are still in the river. Silt accumulating on the downstream side as become the foundation for trees converting these piers into a chain of islands.



LINCOLN HIGHWAY THROUGH PHILADELPHIA

The transcontinental Lincoln Highway was marked out over preexisting roads in 1913, connecting downtown Main Streets from New York City to San Francisco. Although Camden, NJ, was on the original Proclamation Route's list of towns, the Lincoln Highway Association chose to cross the Delaware River at Trenton avoiding the Camden ferry while taking advantage of the soon to be opened Boulevard through Northeast Philadelphia. Mayor Samuel Ashbridge started the Boulevard as a multi-carriageway, 300-foot wide City Beautiful boulevard in 1903. The first couple miles northeast from Broad Street were completed in 1914, and then extended to Pennypack Creek by 1919 when it was named after the recently deceased Teddy Roosevelt, and finally completed to Bucks County in the 1920s becoming the main road into Philadelphia from New York City (below). The Lincoln Highway jumped to each section of Roosevelt Boulevard as it was completed, then south on Broad Street to City Hall (left; north on Broad Street from City Hall), west on Market Street, and out through the Main Line suburbs over Lancaster Avenue.





NOBO PHILADELPHIA

The Lincoln Highway and Roosevelt Boulevard made North Broad Street part of the main road between Center City Philadelphia and New York City at a time when the neighborhood was already booming. As a result, N. Broad became the city's premier automobile row lined with show rooms, gas stations, garages and auto parts stores extending north and south of the Lorraine Hotel, which opened in 1894 as the largest residential hotel in North Philly (left). North Broad experienced a long downward slide with postwar suburbanization that it is just recently starting to recover from, stimulating enough reinvestment to attract the developer marketing acronym, NoBo. Remnant bits of the old auto row survive, most notably the Packard Motor Company showroom built by Albert Kahn in 1911 that was converted into condos in 1986.



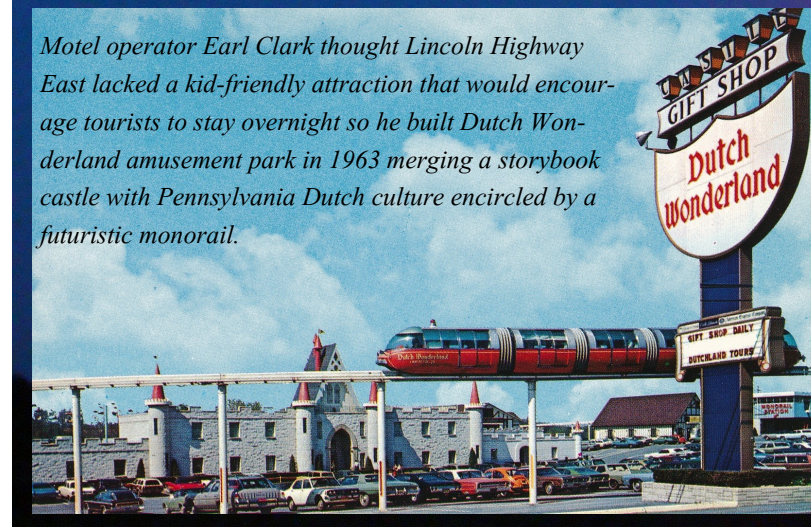
A fading reference to auto radio repair at N. Broad Street & Sedgley Avenue (above). Opened in 1908 and currently being renovated, North Broad's Metropolitan Opera House (below) was at its nadir in 1995



when it made an appearance as the abandoned theater it actually was in the dystopic science fiction movie, 12 Monkeys.



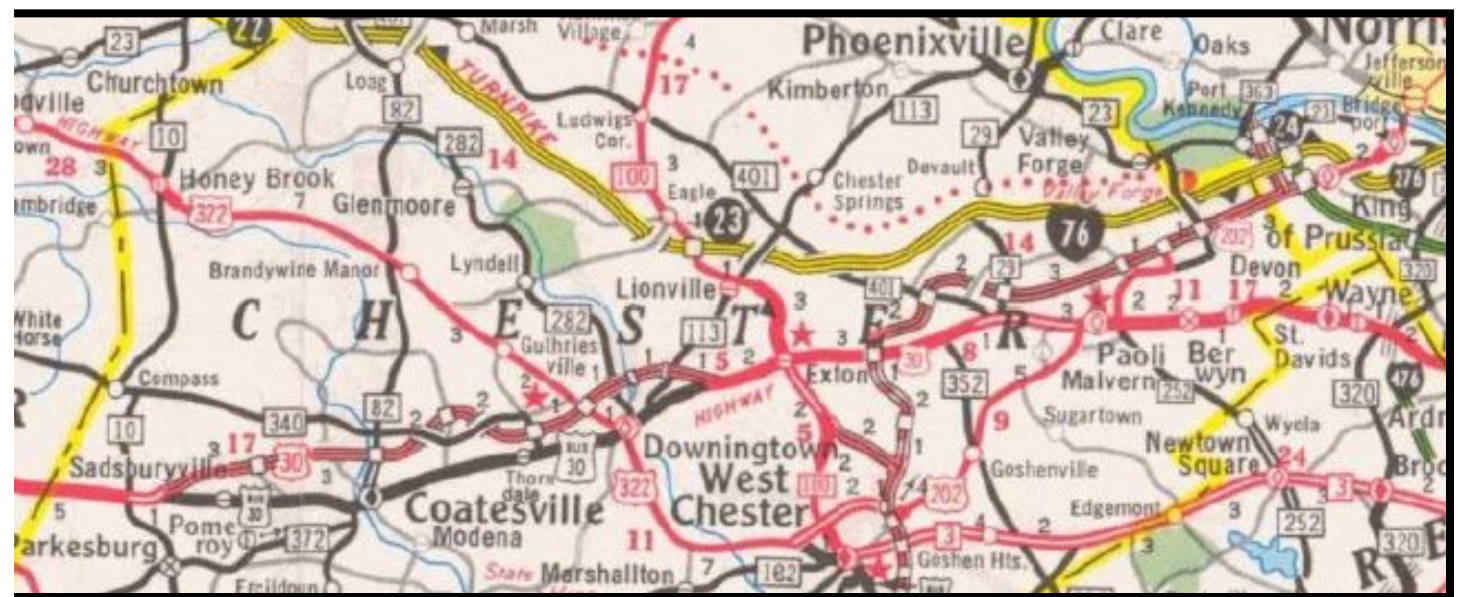
The Willows Restaurant & Motel operated on Lincoln Highway East from 1931 to 1998 as a major tourist destination with the adjacent Amish House and Farm that can still be toured, and covered bridge reconstructed in 1965.



Motel operator Earl Clark thought Lincoln Highway East lacked a kid-friendly attraction that would encourage tourists to stay overnight so he built Dutch Wonderland amusement park in 1963 merging a storybook castle with Pennsylvania Dutch culture encircled by a futuristic monorail.



Route 30 Diner sign on Lincoln Highway East in Ronks. The diner is a 1959 stainless steel Silk City.

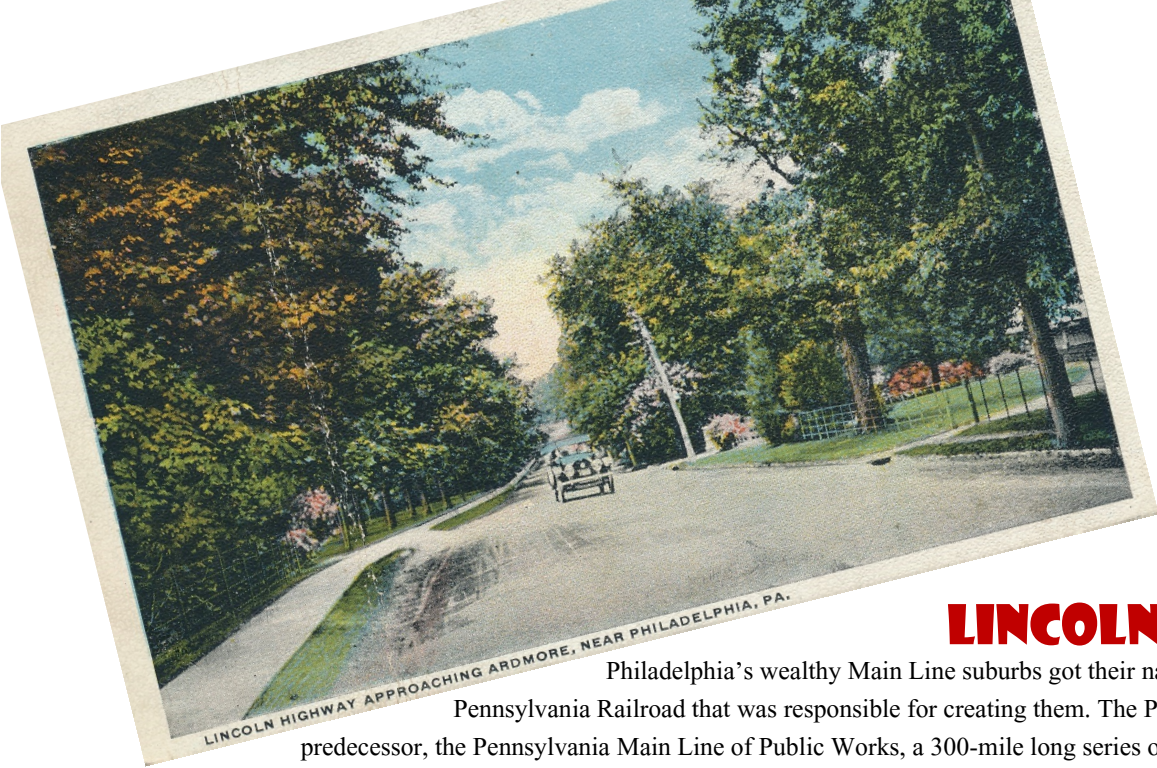


Two other Eric Blumenfeld redevelopment projects in the 600 block of North Broad Street include an old Studebaker showroom (left), and the 1916 terra-cotta clad Roman Automobile Company showroom (right), which was a major used car dealership at the time.



LINCOLN HIGHWAY THROUGH PENNSYLVANIA DUTCH COUNTRY

As the Main Road across Pennsylvania before the 1950 extension of the Pennsylvania Turnpike to Valley Forge, the Lincoln Highway was also the main road into the Pennsylvania Dutch Country from Philadelphia. The 1741 Conestoga Road between Philadelphia and Lancaster followed what is now PA Route 340 (known alternately as the Kings Highway or the Old Philadelphia Pike) through crossroad villages known for the taverns that once operated there like, Bird-in-Hand, Intercourse, and White Horse. The 1794 Philadelphia & Lancaster Turnpike was essentially a straighter, better paved bypass to the older road. Once the most heavily traveled wagon road in America supporting one tavern per mile, this became the route of the Lincoln Highway in 1913, and US Route 30 in 1926. As in the Main Line suburbs, this transportation corridor includes the old Pennsylvania Railroad Main Line now operated by Amtrak, which crosses the Lincoln Highway in the village of Paradise (above left). Remnant bits of bypassed Lincoln Highway can also be found like the section winding down Gap Hill entering the lush farmland of the Conestoga Valley (below left). Lincoln Highway East from Lancaster is famous for its Pennsylvania Dutch tourist attractions and infamous for its traffic jams.



MAIN LINE LINCOLN HIGHWAY

Philadelphia’s wealthy Main Line suburbs got their name from the Main Line of the Pennsylvania Railroad that was responsible for creating them. The PRR borrowed the name from its predecessor, the Pennsylvania Main Line of Public Works, a 300-mile long series of state-owned canals and railroads that spanned the Allegheny Mountains between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. The first section opened as the Philadelphia & Columbia Railroad in 1832, and the entire system was purchased by the Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR) in 1857 three years after opening its own Main Line between the same terminal points. The PRR straightened its Main Line tracks to the current alignment in 1869, and for the next 60 years railroad suburbs were laid out along its right-of-way: Merion, Wynnewood, Ardmore, Bryn Mawr, Rosemont, Wayne, Devon, Berwyn, Paoli, Malvern, and many smaller developments in between. Like a twisted cable, the Main Line tracks are braided among a paralleling network of older and newer roads that have extended westward from Philadelphia since colonial days. Following Indian trail antecedents, the Conestoga Road was built between Philadelphia and Lancaster in 1741, followed by the straighter and macadam-paved (crushed limestone) Philadelphia & Lancaster Pike in 1794. When the Lincoln Highway was routed through the Main Line in 1913, it followed the Lancaster Pike. Increased train and automobile traffic caused the PRR to undertake a grade-separation program for the five places the Main Line tracks crossed the Lancaster Pike between Devon and Malvern. When automobile traffic increased further, these narrow bridges and underpasses bound by tight S-curves became obsolete, and were replaced by a new alignment in 1927 that stayed to one side of the tracks. The identity of the Lincoln Highway was soon to fade behind the US Route 30 shields that replaced it.



MAIN LINE LINCOLN HIGHWAY IN DEVON-BERWYN, PA

- 1st Generation (Pre-Lincoln Highway), Conestoga Road, 1741
- 2nd Generation (Lincoln Highway Age), Lancaster Pike, 1794
- 3rd Generation (Post-Lincoln Highway), Lancaster Ave./US 30, 1927
- Pennsylvania Railroad Main Line (Phila. & Columbia RR, 1832, realigned 1869)

MAIN LINE LINCOLN HIGHWAY

1. The Lincoln Highway S-curve underpass built beneath the Pennsylvania Main Line at Devon in 1917 was bypassed ten years later by relocating US Route 30 to the south side of the tracks.
2. This Tudor-style cottage gas station opened in Devon soon after the 1927 realignment of US 30 to the south side of the PRR Main Line tracks.
3. Each Main Line suburb had its own business districts within walking distance of the train station. Larger suburbs like Wayne attracted more businesses and could support higher-order retailing like the 1,300-seat Anthony Wayne Theater. The Anthony Wayne opened in 1928 with a style popular for theaters at the time that was a flamboyant blend of Spanish Baroque and Art Deco.
4. The exotic motifs and machine-line repetition of abstract patterns that came to be recognized as Art Deco Moderne was a natural fit for automobile showrooms like the 1931 E.B. Maguire Ford dealership on the Lincoln Highway in Wayne.
5. The Frazer Diner opened on the Lincoln Highway west of Malvern in 1935. Built in Jersey City, NJ, by the Jerry O'Mahoney Company, the diner retains its original Streamline Moderne profile with curved corners, stainless steel and porcelain enamel panels.



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PENNSYLVANIA DUTCH COUNTRY

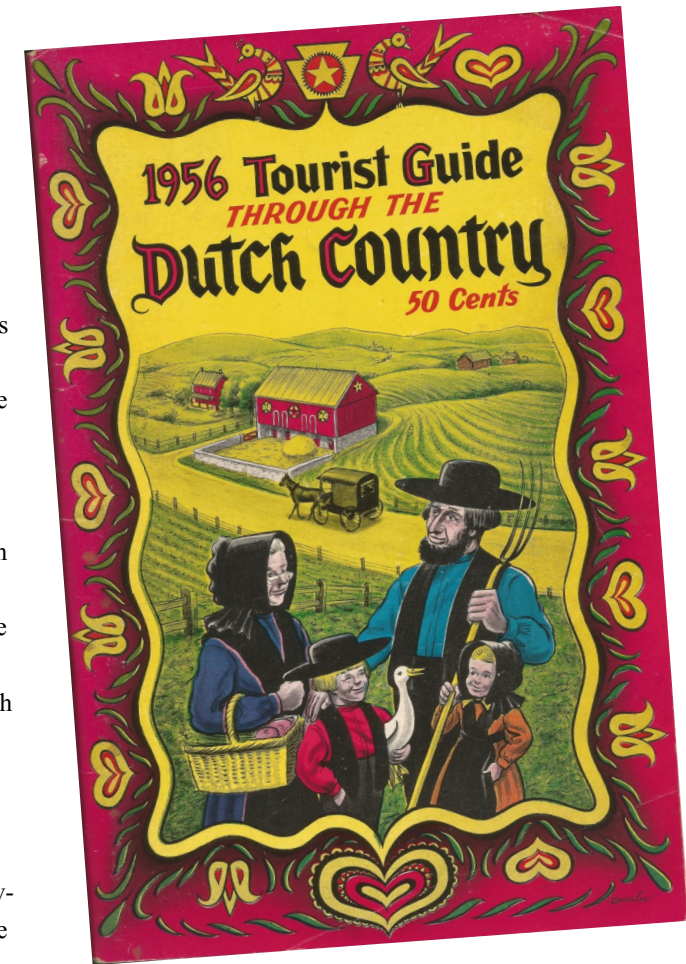
Offering religious freedom, William Penn encouraged Swiss and German farmers to settle the western and northern frontier of his colony as far as Blue Mountain, and Susquehanna River. This was especially appealing for Plain sect Anabaptists (Mennonites and Amish) who like the Quakers suffered persecution in the aftermath of the Protestant

Reformation. This Deutsch, or German-speaking, population with their unique cultural traits and foodways were known to their Anglo neighbors as Dutch, or to tourists as Pennsylvania Dutch. With the widespread adoption of the automobile and paved roads, the Pennsylvania Dutch Country came to define a tourist region people from nearby cities could see a traditional farming population living a pre-Modern lifestyle, and eat German

food. Despite their interpretation of photographs of themselves as graven images, Amish people in their customary dress became the roadside icon for everything Pennsylvania Dutch, showing up on signs, brochures and menus throughout the region.



The Dempsey Diner Dutchman once shilled for a regional Pennsylvania Dutch diner chain.



This 1950 Esso Pictorial Map of Southeastern Pennsylvania shows icons and attractions of the Pennsylvania Dutch Country including Amish and tobacco fields near Lancaster, a pretzel for Lititz, Daniel Boone's Homestead, Roadside America, and plenty of stuff related to the American Revolution.