



Landmarks at the intersection included a gas station with an Acme Super Market next to it on the Chew St. side and the Walton movie theater adjoining it on the Cheltenham Ave side. Across the street were a drug store on one corner, a tap room on another corner and a dry cleaner on the remaining corner. The dry cleaner location had been the scene of a very bad crash years earlier between a fire truck racing to an emergency and an auto. I can still remember the newspaper accounts.



Once on board the 52 car I liked to stand off to the side of the motorman by the other double doors. He usually stood while operating the car and collecting fares. On occasion he would swing his wooden seat around mounted on a vertical pole behind him and rest while in motion. He had assorted paper transfers arranged in front of him for those who needed a pass to continue on a second vehicle to their destination. Transfer slips were different colors

for different directions and were punched with expiration time. The current date was imprinted on the transfer.

The operator would collect fares at each stop when passengers entered. He had a coin changer on his belt for those needing bills broken for the fare box. Those were the days long before the exact fare required policy went into effect. At each start he would hit the bell clapper with his heel two times indicating he was about to begin motion. The operator always kept a hand on the controller or the brake handle even when making fare transactions.

Once under way, we passed homes, both duplexes and row houses, on Cheltenham Ave. to Musgrave St. The street would then descend "Magnolia Hill" with St. Vincent's Seminary on the left side of the car. Behind buildings on the other side of the street as we approached Morton St. one might see freight cars at the "upper" Germantown freight yard on the Reading Co.'s Chestnut Hill branch.

Beyond Baynton St. the car tracks passed beneath the railroad tracks at Germantown Station. All these tracks formerly crossed at grade until the railroad electrified and elevated the line, perhaps in the early 1930s.

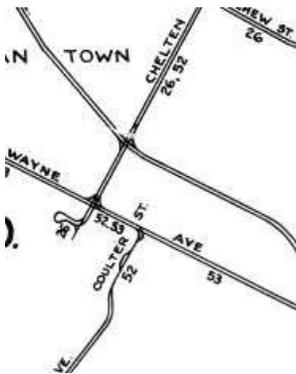
The main freight yard was here at street level adjoining the elevated passenger station. Multiple tracks offered LCL (Less-than-carload-lots) unloading capabilities. I remember box cars, usually lettered Lehigh and New England or Northampton and Bath RRs being manually unloaded of 55 lb. bags of cement in paper sacks. Local building supply firms such as Dennis and James F. Nolan Company got their cement requirements this way. I'm pretty sure there was also a gantry crane for special loading/unloading

situations. Sometimes one might see a Reading switcher, normally a Baldwin, working the yard or waiting to enter the main line between half-hourly MU commuter trains. After the freight yard the trolley headed towards Cheltenham and Germantown Aves. Passing the Whosoever Gospel Mission on the right along with Calvani's Seafood and Massanisso's Auto Repair and then a fire house for Engine #.19 and Battalion #9. The fire house would later be relocated to a new facility at the corner of Cheltenham and Baynton St. beyond the Reading Station that also housed Ladder 8 and Rescue 10 as well as the engine company and the chief. Across from the original fire house was an Acme Supermarket and Rowell's Department Store. Just beyond the busy intersections was a Linton's restaurant in front of which was the terminal for bus route E. One could ride from here all the way to 69<sup>th</sup> St. Upper Darby.

A large church and parking lot were followed by all types of retail stores and across from them was the Orpheum Theater. Falatico's restaurant preceded Greene St. with Allen's Department store. Germantown's business district in those days was a bustling shopping area served by four streetcar lines (23,26, 52, 53), four bus lines (E,H,XH, and J) and two railroads (PRR and Reading).

Farther up that block was E&H (Electronics and Hobbycraft) Hobbies with sears across the street and a popular German restaurant called Imhof's. Wayne and Cheltenham Avenues came next (the location of the aforementioned Christmas card). A large Penn Fruit Co. supermarket and parking lot occupied one corner with a used car lot across from there. The other two corners, as I recall, had nothing of major interest although in later years the Pickett Middle School was constructed on of those lots. Commercial buildings shown on the greeting card also came later. Rt -26 using single ended cars would continue farther west on Cheltenham Ave. to Pulaski Ave. close to the PRR Cheltenham Ave. station. And turn to access the reversing loop to Rittenhouse St.

Rt. 52 turned south onto Wayne Ave. and shared tracks with Rt. 53 Wayne Ave. as far as Coulter St.



Generally the automatic (Selectric) track switch at Wayne and Cheltenham cooperated for the motorman but, once in a while he would have to exit the car and manually move the switch point with his long steel throw bar for his correct routing. (Editor note: from my own experience I'd say the malfunction was generally attributable to operator error rather than mechanical).

More residential homes were to be found on either side of Wayne Ave. passing School House Lane to Coulter. Rt. 52 turned onto Coulter and the double tracks immediately became single track for the entire length due to the narrow roadway and two-way traffic. The track occupied the center of the street with a passing siding between Knox and Morris Streets as I recall.

Nachod block signals controlled trolley movements in this area. I think a spring switch forced southbound cars into the siding. We always seemed to take the siding regardless if there was an oncoming car or not. Once past Morris St. the line crossed over the PRR Chestnut Hill branch which was submerged in a deep cut well below street level. (note the name of Colonial/Revolutionary War era personalities such as Greene, Knox, Morris, Pulaski, Rittenhouse, Wayne, etc. Even Washington Lane was not too far away).

## Midvale Aveue



Southbound Rt.52 car on Midvale Ave. at Vaux St. This neighborhood seems to have remained well groomed to this date.

The trolleys then turned from Coulter St. into Midvale Ave. and the tracks became double once again. Rounding a bend in the roadway one could see the Queen Lane station of the PRR on the left. It, like some other stations on the branch had a unique covered pedestrian overpass connecting the in and outbound platforms. Now and then a Tuscan Red set of MP54 commuter cars with their

distinctive owl windows on the ends might be seen.

On rare occasions a Baldwin switcher might have a drag of 50 ft. box cars from nearby Midvale Yard where cars were staged to/from the Budd Company automobile parts manufacturing plant (frames and other components such as trunk lids and door panels) along Hunting Park Ave.

Rt. 52 then crested a short incline at Stokeley St. passing an unusual street called "Oak St." so named because of an extremely large oak tree that was centered on an island in the street with the traffic lanes



going around it. Stokeley is the point where I disembarked for my appointments.

This stop was also used by many students coming and going to nearby Penn Charter School. The street and trolley line began a long gradual descent to East Falls, passing Henry Ave. where one could look a block to the right and see the former home of Grace Kelly who was later the Princess of Monaco. The 52 line



This 1948 view shows the Cheltenham neighborhood as being well maintained. Photo obviously taken from the author's favorite position on the front platform of a northbound car.

terminated at Ridge Ave. with the track pulling over to the left curb by the southeast corner.



Car 5327 at the Ridge/Midvale southern terminus of PTC Rt. 52.

This photo reveals quite a bit of information. The picture taken in June 1955 was obtained from Railroad Ave. Enterprises, Box 114, Flanders, NJ 07836. Negative PN-6518. The destination sign reads York Road & Chelten which is the other end of the line. That end of the line ended in the middle of the street at a crossover from one track to the other. Since there is no diagonal red line through the number, this was not an abbreviated (i.e. short turn) run. Because these cars were double ended it was not normally necessary to change the destination sign at the other end of the line. I believe most of these Brill cars were maintained at the Pelham Depot in Mt. Airy and the Rt.-52 cars would get there by traveling on Germantown Ave along Rt. 23 to get to/from the Depot.

The Abbott's Ice Cream sign is another memory of the past. I suspect the motorman took bathroom breaks here as there was no facility at the other end of the line. If I recall correctly, a trolley bus operated along Ridge Ave (Rt.-61) that terminated a few blocks farther west at Ridge Ave. and Main St. in Manyunk. The trees in the distance in this photo are on the west bank of the Schuylkill River

A short walk from the trolley terminus would bring one to East River Drive, where on a Fairmount Park bench one could watch freight and passenger trains. B&O trains used the "Blue Line" bridge across the

river, traveling from Jersey City, NJ to Washington, DC and beyond. Freight trains of adjoining Reading. Jersey Central/B&O connecting service used the same tracks while Reading Co. trains to the north and west used the original stone arch bridge from East to West Falls. The falls in the river were already long gone. On more than one occasion I would see new stainless steel passenger cars coming down from Budd's Red Lion Plant in Northeast Philadelphia destined to the Chicago gateway carrying road names such as CB&Q, Santa Fe, and Western Pacific.



One final thought comes to mind. Driving an automobile on trolley/streetcar tracks was a challenge and with experience like many things, the task was to be mastered. Even when dry the steel rails were slippery and when wet they were extremely slippery. One had to straddle the rails to get traction but, at least in Philadelphia, the Belgian block pavers were used as ship ballast for vessels coming from Europe. I won't even try to imagine what trolley tracks do or did to inexperienced motorcycle riders. Today the term "Belgian Blocks" has become generic for all granite landscaping stones.



Two more photographs are presented here. One shows a Rt.-53 older style air-electric PCC turning into its terminal loop at Carpenter Lane in West Mount Airy and a Rt.-23 newer all-electric PCC entering its loop at Germantown Ave. and Bethlehem Pike in Chestnut Hill. This is the highest point in Philadelphia

County and is 400 feet above sea level. In the photo the car's destination sign has already been changed to read its destination at 10<sup>th</sup> & Oregon Ave. in South Philadelphia over 16 miles distant. In later years the line was extended several blocks south of Oregon to Bigler St.

The all-electric cars with their distinctive standee windows were built postwar for one or two man operation, mainly on Rt.-23. Immediately behind the car is the street-level canopy covering the entrance to the PRR Chestnut Hill station down below. A steep ramp went from the Germantown Ave. sidewalk down to the platform and ticket office. Both photos again came from Railroad Avenue Enterprises. The Wayne Ave. scene is on



Wayne Ave. scene is on negative 8732 dated June 5,, 1979 whereas the Germantown Ave scene is negative PN-5911 dated

August 16, 1948. It is interesting to note that for many many years the PCCs turned counterclockwise on this loop. In the late 1970s not long before the line was discontinued, the tracks were re-arranged to make the cars rotate clockwise. This ostensibly allowed for safer and quicker turns on the loop. Also interesting is that the roof is still painted in the as-delivered grey color, barely discernable in the black and white photo



SEPTA 2105 has just turned in a clockwise direction on the Mt. Airy loop following track re-arrangement. Date is August 21, 1983. Direction was reversed during track renewal in order to ease the flow of traffic in the area. Rt.23 made its last runs on February 27, 1992 but a short section called the Chestnut Hill trolley resumed heritage streetcar service between Germantown Depot and Chestnut Hill loop between September 13, 1992 and June 15, 1996 when the Germantown streetcars were permanently shut down. Bill Volkmer photo

**Epilogue**

Fast forward to 1990. Rts-26 and 52 were converted to bus lines during the mid- 1950s. Both lines, 26 and 52 were bussed January 28, 1956. I think the former 52 designation was changed to "K". Rts. 23 and 53 continued up to the early 1980s. On October 12, 1990 I discovered that Wayne Ave. was being prepared for re-surfacing and the particular stretch from Coulter St. to Johnson St. (working northward) had been milled. On the 16th I managed to get some poor quality snapshots of the remaining trackage at Wayne & Chelten as well as the last visible rail at the Coulter St. switch. By the 18th the first layer of asphalt covered Windrim Ave. in the Wayne Junction area where the repaving began as far as Walnut Lane. A day later paving had progressed to Lincoln Drive farther north and



10-16-1990  
WAYNE & CHELTEN AVES  
PHILA PA  
PICKETT MIDDLE SCHOOL

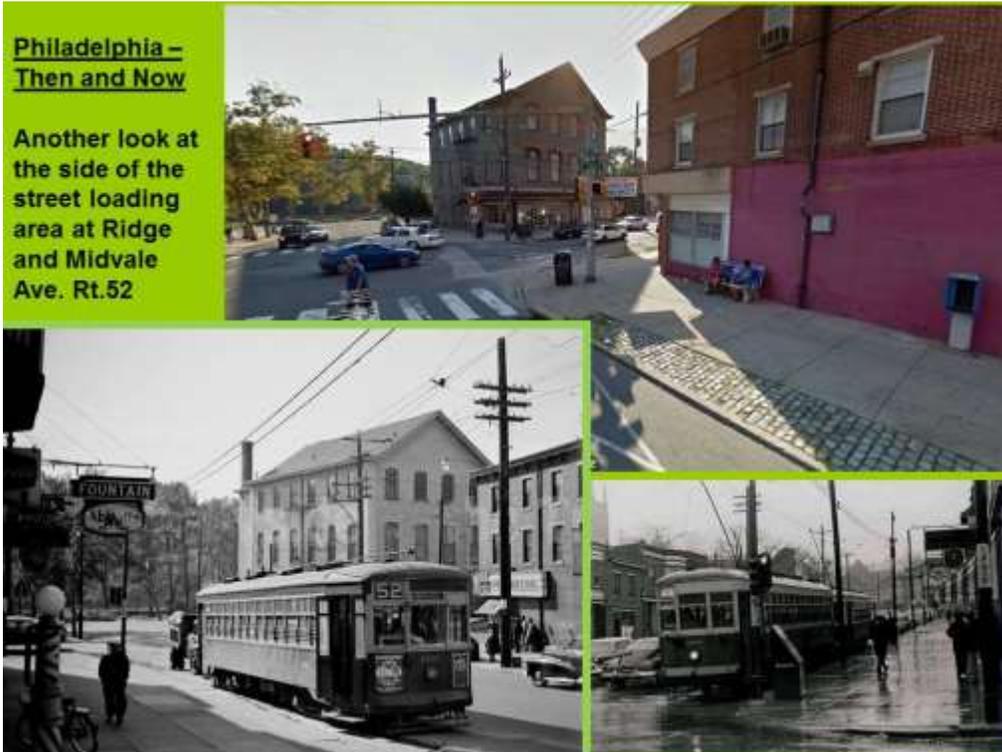
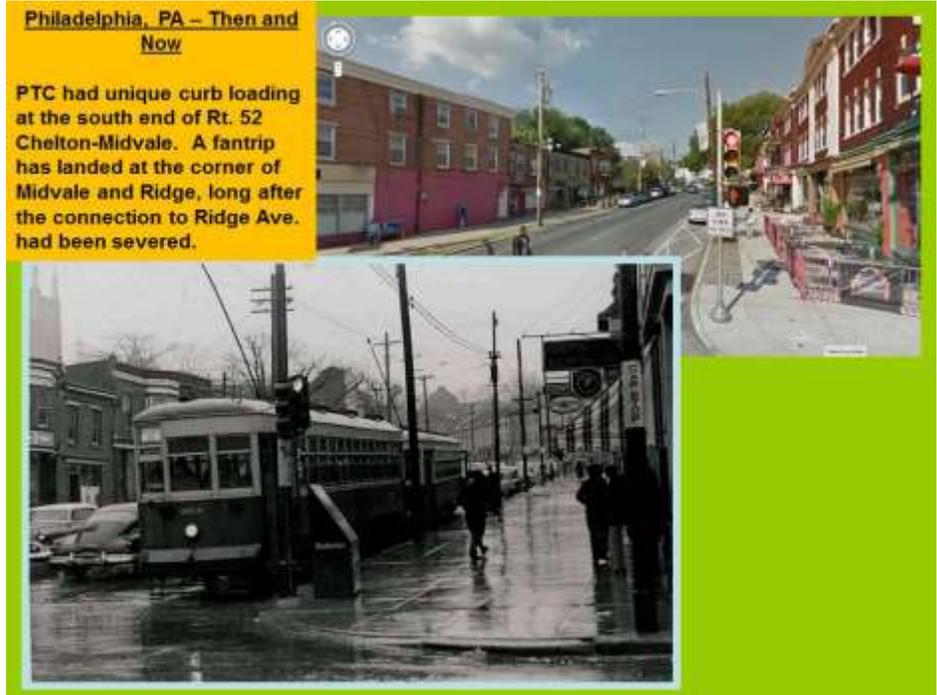


10-16-1990  
WAYNE AVE &  
COULTER ST

Belgian blocks were disappearing. By the end of the month the final paving layer had progressed working south as far as School House Lane and the next day to Seymour St. Milling and first layer paving went in one direction and the final coating moved in the opposite direction.

I believe the Wayne Ave. bridge over the PRR tracks near Johnson St. was eventually replaced and thus probably disappeared the last remnants of Rt.-53 car tracks.

In case you may be wondering what the area looks like today, we present two Art Wheeler “then and now” renderings of the Chelton/Midvale Ave. southern terminal.



The kid with the bicycle was probably in the barbershop getting a haircut and not surprised when exiting that his bike was still there.



This article was originally written by Joe Boscoe and was edited and formatted by Bill Volkmer, who supplied additional photos from his own collection.