

Railroads Connect the Dots in Delaware: The Wilmington Amtrak Station and Railroad Buildings

Introduction to the Lesson

(image 1 L1 station at night)

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It's 7:00 am on a busy Tuesday morning at the Wilmington Amtrak Station. Some people stand in line at the coffee shop while others are negotiating the digital ticketing kiosks at the other end of the waiting room. Business men and women sit staring at the arrival and departure sign with their laptops and tote bags ready for their train to be called. The loud speaker announces a train arriving from New York to Washington and a large group of people start up the stairs to the track. At the last minute, Senator Tom Carper and Congressman Mike Castle and their aids sweep up the stairs to begin their journey to Washington.

What these people don't know is that, like most small cities in America, Wilmington owes much of its success to the railroad. It has positioned Wilmington as the lynchpin between Washington DC and New York City for freight, travel and commuters, literally "connecting the dots" between small communities and large metropolises. As is true for many cities, the railroad was the backbone for the success of Delaware's industry and agriculture. Towns, like Wilmington, all across the United States were elevated to city status as a result of their connection to the new convenient railroad of the late 1800's.

Today in a higher tech world, the railroad provides a thoroughfare for moving people to and from financial and governmental positions in larger cities. We owe much of the success of America's small cities like Wilmington to the railroad. Chances are your community can point it's success to the railroad. Let's find out!

About this Lesson

A. Citation

This lesson is based on the National Register of Historic Places registration file for the Wilmington Amtrak Station and Offices and the Baltimore and Ohio Passenger Station along with primary and secondary sources found in local historical archives. It is written by Leslie Hubbard of LMH Consulting for the Frank Furness Railroad District.

B. Where it fits into the Curriculum

This lesson is a great addition to any history units on the industrialization of the United States and the importance of the railroad to the success and development of America's cities. This lesson will introduce teachers and students to the Wilmington Amtrak station

and railroad buildings, their significance, the history of the Delaware Railroads, and the influence of the Railroad Industry on 19th century America.

C. Student Objectives

- Students will identify the location of the Wilmington Amtrak Station and Offices and the B&O Passenger Station.
- Students will give examples of how and why the uses of the Wilmington Riverfront area has evolved from the late 19th century to present.
- Students will construct a timeline of the history of the Delaware Railroad system in order to illustrate the growth and development of the railroad in Delaware.
- Students will compare and contrast the impact of the railroad on 19th century America to the impact of the Internet on the 21st century.
- Students will conduct research illustrating how the railroad industry influenced the history of their local town or community.

D. Materials for students

The readings, maps, and other primary sources are designed to be photocopied or projected in PowerPoint for classroom use. The photographs appear twice: in a low resolution version with text and activity instructions and alone in a high resolution version for educational purposes.

Students will use:

- 1 Map;
- Three Readings
- Six Primary Sources

Additionally the teacher will need:

- A 4-5 ft. length of continuous roll of paper for each student
- Craft Supplies (markers, glue, pencils, rulers)
- Access to computers and the Internet
- Five pieces of poster board

E. Visiting the Site

The Wilmington Amtrak Station and offices, and the B&O Passenger Station is a cluster of buildings located on the Wilmington Riverfront. Together with the Rail Viaduct they comprise the Frank Furness Railroad District. You are invited to visit the Wilmington Amtrak Station everyday. The Pennsylvania Railroad Offices and the B&O Passenger Station are both inhabited by ING Direct and are not open to the public; however you can view them from the outside.

Teaching Activities

A. Getting Started

(Image 2 L1 postcard white horse)

Reproduced courtesy of the Delaware Historical Society.

What is this building used for? Why is it important to the town it is located in?

B. Setting the Stage

In the 1800's, Wilmington, Delaware was a factory town in an otherwise farming state. Wilmington was Delaware's gateway to the industrial north. Ferries and ships took goods up and down the east coast and to cities overseas. Ship building, paper production, iron work and carriage building were the major industries. They were located on the Delaware riverfront. The rest of the state was rural. There people grew peaches and other crops on farms. Many were fishermen.

By 1870, small towns up and down the Delmarva Peninsula built railway stations to help carry peaches, seafood and people north to Wilmington. Wilmington had become a bustling city. It had a big new station located on the riverfront. There companies and factories could use the railroad to move goods. The railroad had grown quickly. In 1900, just 20 years after the new station was built, the Pennsylvania Railroad decided Wilmington needed a new one. They asked Frank Furness, a famous American railroad architect, to design a new central station, and offices for Wilmington. Today that station still stands. One hundred years later, Wilmington is a center for banking and finance. No longer is the riverfront home to factories and ship docks. Now town houses, stores and restaurants are being built there. Still the railroad is at the center of the area's economy.

This history is repeated all over America. When small country towns became linked by the railroad, they grew and changed. Suddenly farmers could get their goods to market. People could travel easily to the cities. The cities became bigger as factories were built to take advantage of the railway. The factories provided jobs and the cities became richer than ever before. Cities began to build bigger buildings. Often we can trace the growth of a town by looking at the changes made to the town's railroad station over time. We owe the success of many of America's small cities to the growth of the railroad.

C. Locating the Site

(Image 3 L1: DE Map w/ callout)

Reproduced courtesy of the Delaware Historical Society.

Wilmington Delaware is situated amongst 5 major metropolitan cities on the East Coast. It owes its success to its rich industrial heritage and the importance of the railroad for passenger and freight transportation.

1. What big cities are close to Wilmington? How far are they from Wilmington?
2. Why do you think the railroad would be important to Wilmington?
3. Why do you think the railroad buildings are found on the banks of the Christina river?

D. Determining The Facts

Reading 1: History of railroads in Delaware

In 1832, Frenchtown Railroad opened for business. It connected the path from New Castle to Frenchtown on the Elk River. It was the first railroad in Delaware. Frenchtown was the place where people met the train to travel from southern Delaware to the big city. Along with the ferries people could get to Washington DC much quicker than before.

In 1838, the Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore railroad took over. The railroad connected these three main cities. In 1859, rail lines were built downstate to Seaford. The railroad made Wilmington a major transportation city. For the first time, farmers in southern Delaware could get their peaches, seafood and other crops to the big northern cities before they spoiled.

Soon new railroad tracks were opening from Wilmington to towns west and south. The railroad created a spider web of tracks all over the state. For the first time, it was easier to get goods from one small town to another. These lines allowed people to travel further to visit family and friends. Delaware small towns grew as the lines extended to their boundaries.

By 1870, Wilmington's riverfront had become a bustling business center. Ship and carriage factories had been built along the Christina River. They used the railroad and the river to move goods easily. The train tracks along French Street acted as a boundary between city neighborhoods and the factories along the river. The train station was a simple building. It had inside ticket booths and a roofed porch to shelter passengers as they waited for the train. The train was announced by a man who ran out to the tracks as the train was coming and changed the signals by hand.

By the mid 1880's the railroad changed hands and became the Baltimore and Ohio. Its tracks were all throughout Delaware. It was a huge success. People loved the railroad. It was exciting and new! It changed the way people traveled around Delaware and brought new products and jobs to the city. Wilmington built a big fancy new station. There was just one problem. As more people and companies used it, the ground level tracks became dangerous to wagons and passengers trying to cross. Horses were spooked by loud trains. Their wagons were often hit and wrecked.

Pennsylvania Railroad, who now owned the railroad, planned to solve the problem by building the tracks on bridges over the streets. They contracted with Frank Furness, a famous Philadelphia architect to design a new station. It would replace the old one and use these elevated lines. They knew Furness was the man for the job. He had designed lots of public buildings. He designed the commuter station on Market and Water Streets that took passengers from the outlying suburbs into the city. He designed a new station that had elevated tracks. People and wagons could travel under the tracks safely because the tracks were on bridges above their heads.

In 1907, the new station opened. Wilmington was proud of its new station. It had an ornate clock tower, fancy women's and men's waiting areas, a restaurant and news stand. Pennsylvania Railroad had major offices in the adjoining building next door. It was a symbol of how successful Wilmington had become.

In the 1920s the automobile became the new popular invention. When they got cheap enough for people to afford to own them, train travel fell out of favor. Manufacturers found that trucks were easier and could go more places. People liked to drive themselves rather than rely on schedules to get places. By the mid 20th century when air transportation became available, the railroad went out of fashion. Amtrak took over rail travel all along the east coast.

Then in the 1970's and 1980's interest in the train began to grow. When gas and housing became more expensive, people began to look for houses in less expensive small cities. They worked in the big cities where they could make more money. They found the railroad an easy and pretty inexpensive way to get to work.

Today Wilmington has become a commuter center. People travel to Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore and Washington to work every day. Today, the riverfront has changed from an area filled with factories, to a neighborhood with stores, restaurants, museums and offices. Developers are building condominiums for those who want to live a commuter lifestyle. Because of these changes, Wilmington is busy and lively again. There are new services for commuter passengers and local residents. The Railroad is again a symbol of economic success and pride for Wilmington.

Questions:

1. What was the major change in the city of Wilmington from the 1870's to today?
2. What major service did the railroad provide for Delaware's farmers?
3. What did the beginning of the railroad in Wilmington do for people on the East Coast?
4. What could the history of Delaware railroads tell you about the history of your community?

Reading 2: A Brief History of the Wilmington Train Station

In its heyday, Amtrak's Wilmington Train Station was the center of a shipyard and railroad car manufacturing district. The building sits near the edge of the Christina River. The Station was completed between 1906 and 1908 during a period of US Railroad expansion.

The station was designed by Frank Furness of Furness, Evans and Company. Furness was an architect that designed some of America's greatest railroad stations. He designed buildings for the Pennsylvania Railroad, who at that time, was the largest corporation in America. He also worked for the Reading Railroad and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. His buildings were bold and beautiful with many decorations. There were already two other railroad buildings by Frank Furness within a block of each other on the Christina River.

The Amtrak Station in Wilmington was a great feat of engineering when it was built. In most stations, people waited for the trains in rooms above the tracks. They went

downstairs to board the train. In the Amtrak Station, the train tracks were above the main waiting room. They sit on a mighty grid of riveted iron beams. The trains rumble overhead of the waiting travelers as they arrive and leave the station. Travelers go upstairs to board the train. The station has a bold clock tower, a grand staircase and beautiful decorative brass and terra cotta details. Completed in 1908, the Wilmington Amtrak Station is Furness' last great train station.

After World War II the riverfront railroad district became depressed. Wilmington was expanding north and west. The station and other buildings fell into disrepair. The city listed the buildings on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976. This saved them from being torn down. In the 1980's the Wilmington Amtrak Station became part of the Northeast Corridor Improvement Project. The project restored stations up and down the east coast. They spent 8 million dollars to restore the buildings.

Today, just after the station's 100th birthday, the Wilmington Amtrak station and offices are under renovation yet again. The station will still look the same, but inside waiting rooms and public areas will be fixed up and returned to their old glory.

Questions:

1. Who designed the Wilmington Amtrak Station? Why did the Pennsylvania Railroad think he would do a good job designing a train station for Wilmington?
2. What makes the Wilmington Amtrak Station different than others built about the same time?
3. What has Wilmington done to help save the train station over the years? How is the city taking care of the train station for years to come?
4. How old is the nearest train station to you? Who designed the building? Is it preserved so that it can't be torn down? How?

Reading 3: Map of US Railroads 1893

http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?gmd:34:./temp/~ammem_u024::@@@mdb=lhbcbbib,cdn.ngp.papr.afcwip.gmd,pan.afc911bib,denn.runyon,detr.horyd

Rand, Mc.Nally & Co's official railroad map of the United States with portions of the Dominion of Canada, the Republic of Mexico, and the West Indies. Compiled from government surveys, and official tracings and operating time tables of all railroads.

MEDIUM: map 157 x 219 cm. on 4 sheets 84 x 118 cm.

CALL NUMBER: G3701.P3 1893 .R31 RR 66

REPOSITORY: Library of Congress Geography and Map Division Washington, D.C.
20540-4650 USA

DIGITAL ID: g3701p rr000660 <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g3701p.rr000660>

Questions:

1. Use the zoom tools on the webpage to zoom in on your town on the map. What were the closest towns in 1893 that were connected to yours by rail lines?
2. What large cities do you think the railroad connected your community to?
3. What do you think were being shipped to and from your community?
4. How do you think your town changed after the railroad tracks were connected to it?

E. Visual Evidence

Visual Evidence 1: Riverfront Changes

(Image 4 L1 shipyard)

(Image 5 L1 Present aerial)

Reproduced courtesy of the Delaware Historical Society.

These two images are of the same part of the Riverfront area. The engraving shows the area just downstream from the railroad station. The photograph is shown from the opposite bank of the engraving view.

Questions:

1. What is taking place in the engraving? What is the land being used for? How can you tell? What about the photograph? What is the land used for today? How can you tell?
2. The engraving was probably used in an advertisement for Pusey and Jones. What did they manufacture there? What advertisements for businesses can you see in the photograph? What do you think those companies do?
3. Do you think you'd like to live in the area portrayed by the engraving? How about the photo? Which do you think portrays a more valuable use for the riverfront land? Why?
4. Do you have an area that has changed like this in your town? How has it changed? What do you think was the reason for the change?

Visual Evidence 2: The Wilmington Train Station Through out History

(Image 6 L1 French St. 1864)

Reproduced courtesy of the Delaware Historical Society.

(Image 7 L1 Amtrak Station 1907)

Reproduced courtesy of the Delaware Historical Society.

(Image 8 L1 Amtrak Station Air)

Reproduced with permission by Michael Biggs, photographer

The Wilmington Train station has changed dramatically over the last 150 years. Here are photos that mark the changes.

Questions:

1. As you look at the photos in historical order, list at least 2 major changes that took place from one to another.
2. Why do you think the second station was so big and fancy? What does that tell you about how people viewed the Railroad at that time?
3. Why do you think the third (and present) station was an improvement over the one before it? What does it's style tell you about Wilmington's relationship with the railroad?
4. For each photo, write a short paragraph describing what you think it would be like to ride the train from that station.
5. Compare the last photo to the train station in your town. Compare the style of the buildings. What do they tell you about how your town thinks about it's railroad?

F. Putting it all Together

Many small cities owe their success to the expansion of the railroad across America. As the railroad branched out from large cities to smaller ones, with it came industry, jobs and economic success. Often the railroad was the glue that cemented the smaller communities in success that made them survive to the 21st century. The railroad linked people, farmers and industry, connecting the dots between towns and cities across America. It was the most important invention of it's time and can be compared to the internet of today.

A study of Delaware's railroad history is an example of this phenomenon. Without the railroad, Wilmington Delaware would not have become the largest city in the state and an important stop between Washington DC and New York City. In the following activities, students will demonstrate their ability to synthesize the information they have learned about Delaware, understand the importance of the railroad and make discoveries about how the railroad influenced their own communities.

Activity 1: Make a Timeline of the history of the Railroad in Delaware

Hand out a length of continuously rolled paper to each student. Each student will need scissors, glue, pencils, and markers. Using the yardstick, ask each student to make a horizontal line in the middle of their piece of paper. The line should go from end to end. Ask the students to use the information in Readings #1 and 2 and the images in the Visual Evidence section to create a timeline that illustrates the History of Railroads in Delaware from 1832 to present. The students can conduct additional research on the web or at the library to flesh out their timeline and decorate it as they wish. They can print out the images and add them to their timelines as well. Their timeline should include major historical events during that span of time; for instance they should mark the beginning and end of the Civil War, the invention of the automobile etc. When the students are finished, collect the timelines and assess them for accuracy, creativity, and completeness.

Activity 2: Railroads: the Internet of the 19th Century?

Some historians have compared the invention of the railroad with that of the Internet in the 1990's. They believe that the railroad changed our way of life as much, if not more so, than the Internet has. Ask your students to research the invention and development of the Internet and compare it to that of the railroad. They can start their research on the web using the links provided below. Encourage your students to interview their parents about the comparison and how the invention of the internet changed their lives. Suggest that your students interview octogenarians about their memories of the railroad. Hold a discussion that culminates in a vote to decide which was the most important invention; the railroad or the Internet. Students must be able to state their thoughts and back it up with facts and thoughts in order to effectively complete the activity.

http://www.computerhistory.org/internet_history/ Computer History Museum

Activity 3: Create a Traveling Exhibit on the Railroad History of Your Town

In this activity your class will be collectively assembling a traveling poster exhibit about your town's railroad history. Divide your class into 5 groups. Each group will be researching a different kind of source. One will research local libraries and archives, another will research web sources, another will contact your local museum or historical society, another will contact the railroad itself and another will contact local railroad enthusiast clubs about your town's railroad history. Each group will try to answer the following questions in their research:

1. What was our town like before the railroad was built here?
2. What did the railroad allow people to do that they couldn't do before?
3. How did the railroad change our town?
4. What is the history of our town railroad station?
5. How do we see the influences of the railroad on our town today?

The groups should gather photos and other primary sources as well as facts that help answer these five questions. Make sure that the groups attain appropriate permission to use the primary sources for the project. Gather the class and ask each group to present their findings. As the groups present, collect their information and primary sources into 5 different piles, one for the answer to each of the five questions. Then assign each group a question and give them appropriate pile. Each group will be responsible for creating a poster based on the question they have been assigned. Each poster should contain the question, several answers to the question and supporting primary sources to illustrate the answers. Collect and hang the posters in a prominent area of the school for all to visit and learn from. Send the exhibit to other schools in your district to be hung for a period of time. You can even go back to your local historical society, library or railroad station and see if they will hang the exhibit publicly so citizens from your town can learn about it's railroad history.

G. Supplementary Resources

www.hsd.org Historical Society of Delaware

<http://railroads.uconn.edu/index.html> Railroad History Archive