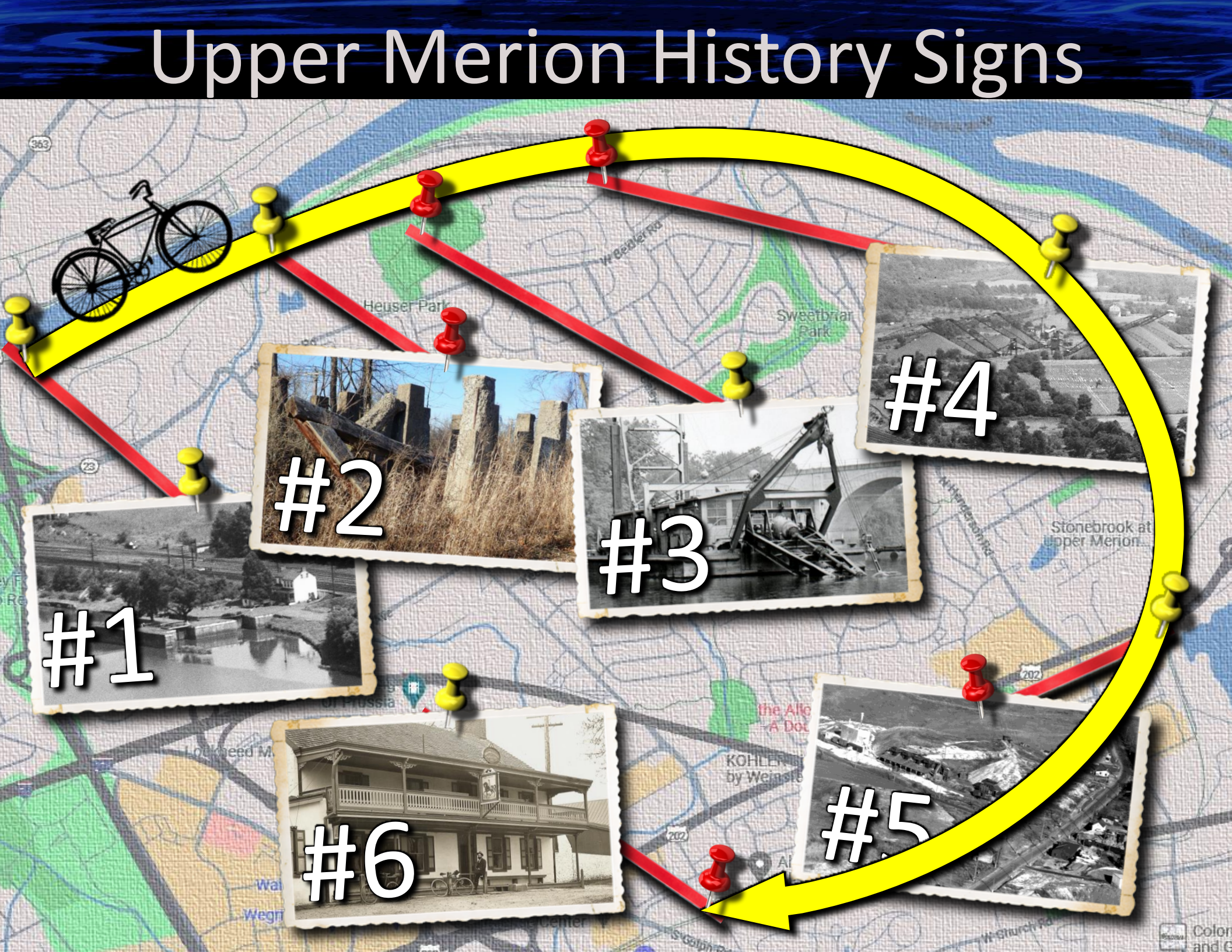
Upper Merion History Signs

Designer - Neil Sardiñas

Contributors - Sandy Sorlien, Rick Bates, Dave Montalvo, Jim Brazel, Chari Towne, Don Herbert, Scott Sibley, Steve Reilly, Tina Smith, Gerri Vattimo, MaryAnn Ahearn, Paul Salamy, Cathy Hranek, Perry Hamilton, Tina Garzillo, Jerry Recupido, Amanda Lafty, Kurt Bell, Sue Bradley and Lydia Dan.

Upper Merion History Signs



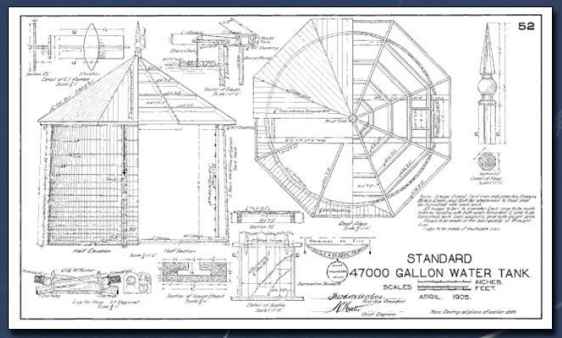
Upper Merion History Signs

#2

The Reading

WATER TANK

c. 1950 - North Abrams Water Tank
Roy Miller Collection



Jerry Mooney Collection

The concrete ruins in front of you supported a wooden Reading Railroad water tank. This tank provided water for steam locomotives through water columns situated between the nearby tracks, as shown below.

Built in 1921, this 47,000-gallon tank with concrete supports was an unusual design on the Reading Railroad. Older water tanks had brick, stone, or wooden bases. Tanks built later in the 1920s were all steel.

This tank had its heaviest usage during World War II. In 1943, it served an average of 33 locomotives per day. It was taken out of service on April 5, 1957, when the Reading's last steam engines in regular service were discontinued. The tank was dismantled by 1960.

1940 - North Abrams Tower & Water Tank - Catfish Lock & Dam - PHMC - PA State Archives - MG-416-1 21089

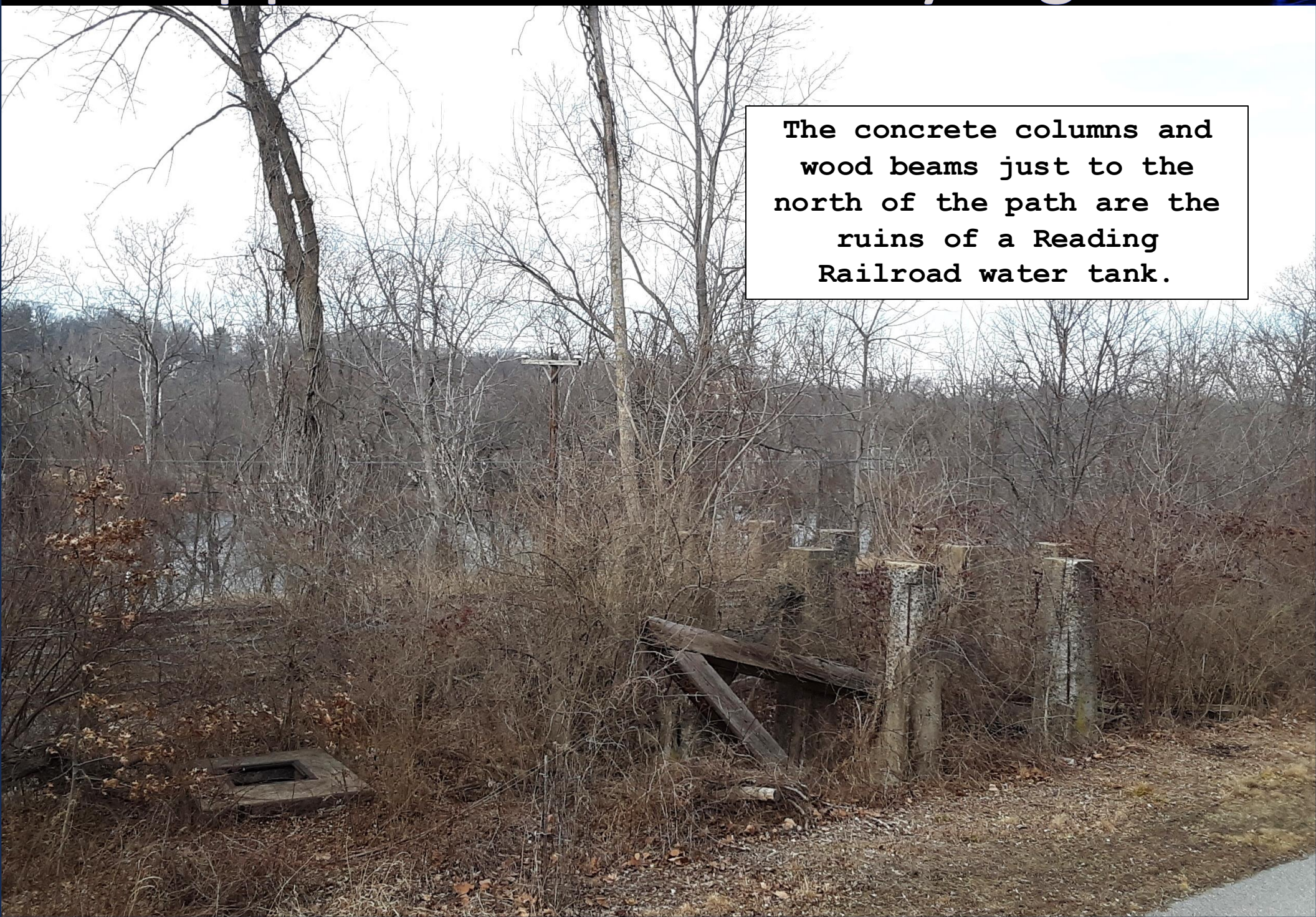
c. 1950 - Water Column - Reading, PA - Robert Wanner
Reading Railroad Heritage Museum Collection

1922 Map - Reading Railroad Heritage Museum Collection

2024
KING OF PRUSSIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

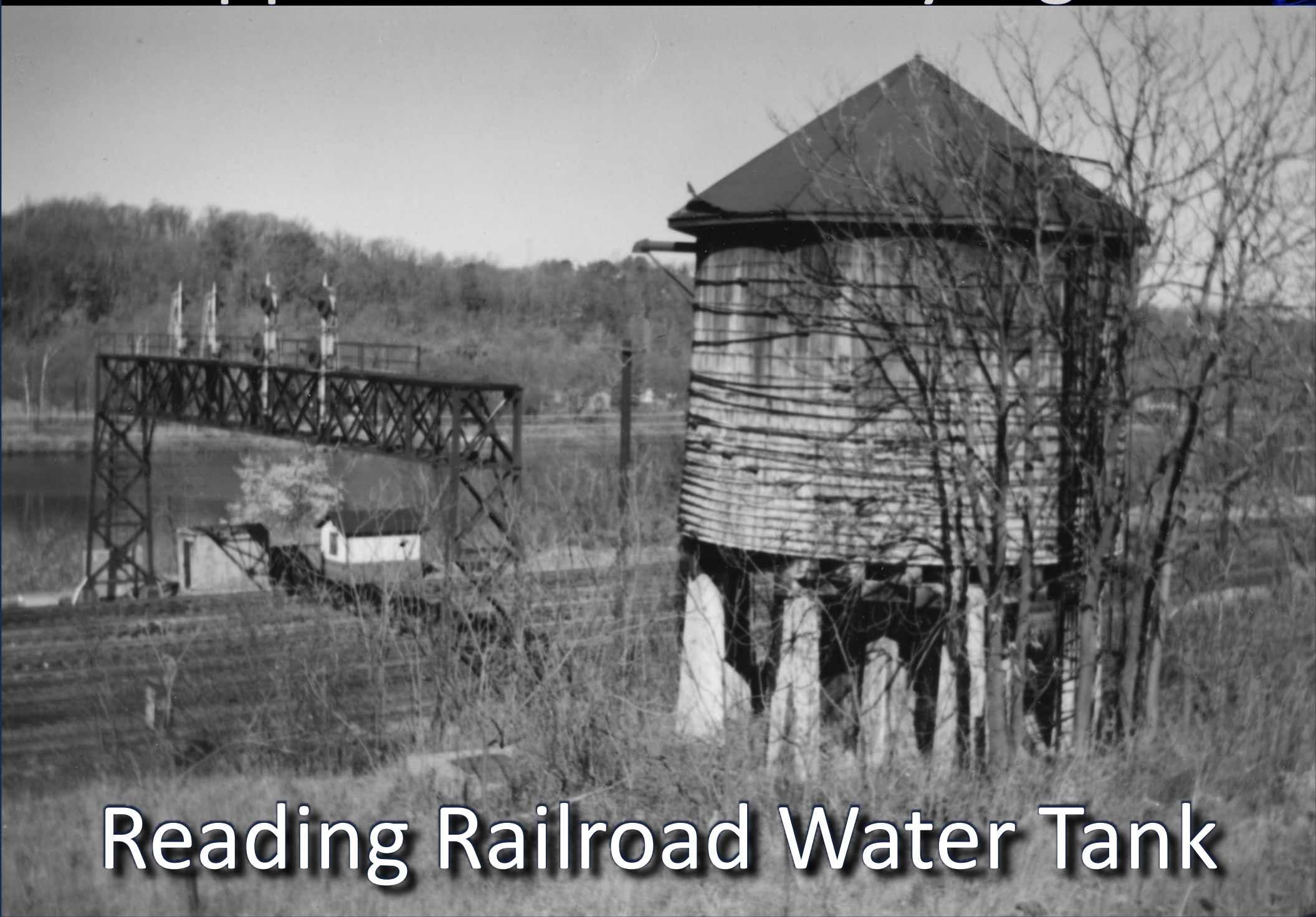
02 Water Tank V39

Upper Merion History Signs



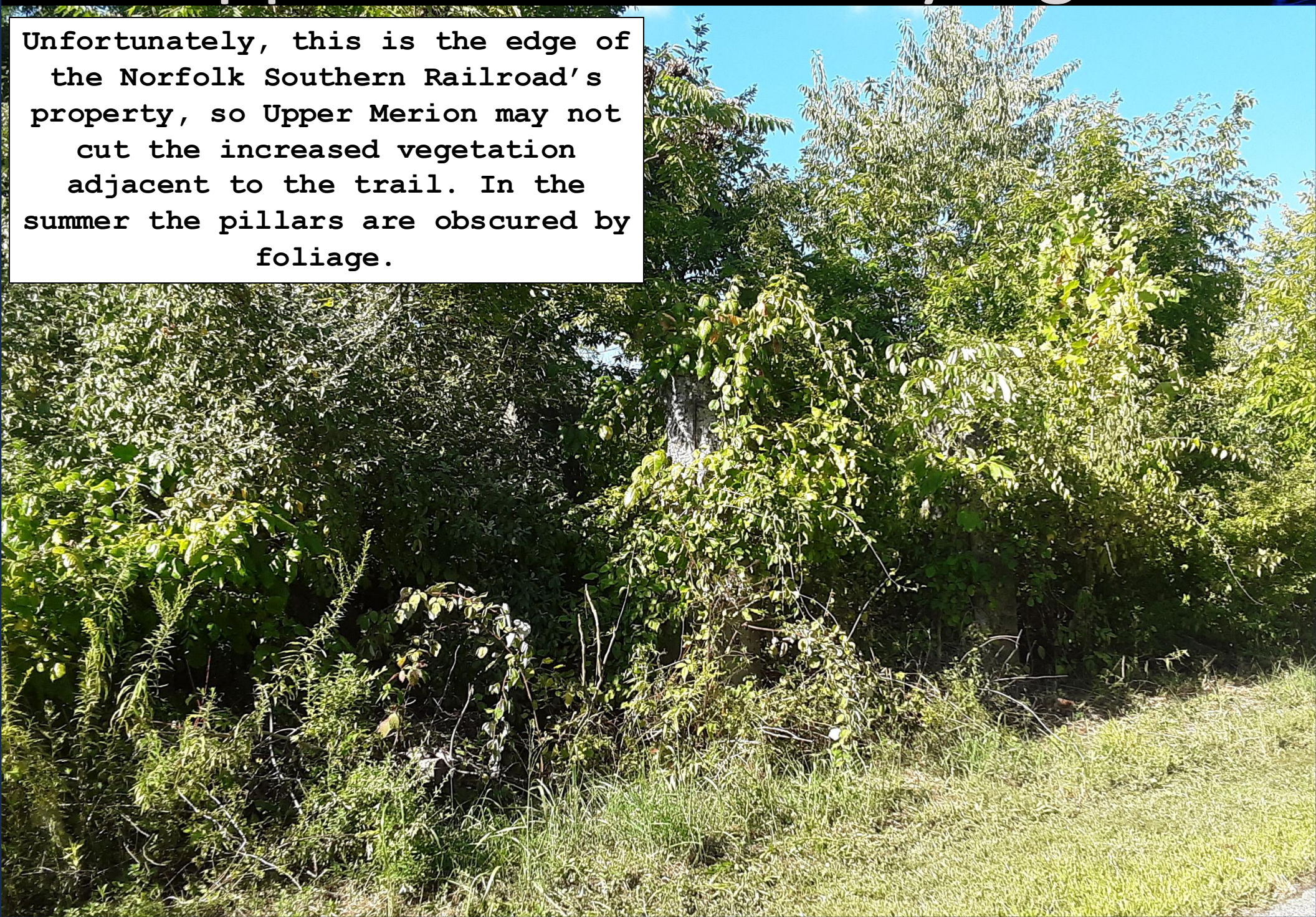
The concrete columns and wood beams just to the north of the path are the ruins of a Reading Railroad water tank.

Upper Merion History Signs



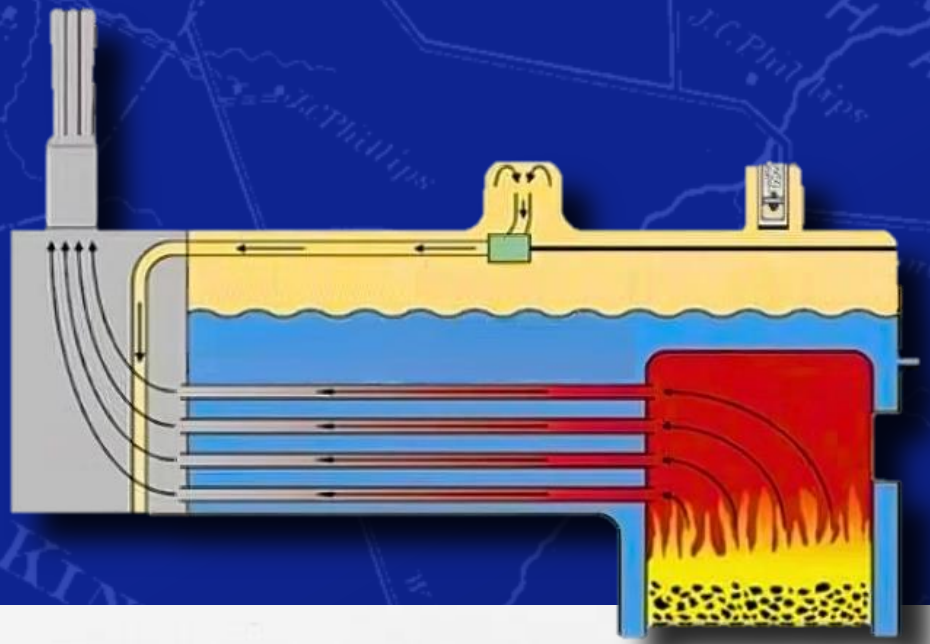
Reading Railroad Water Tank

Upper Merion History Signs



Unfortunately, this is the edge of the Norfolk Southern Railroad's property, so Upper Merion may not cut the increased vegetation adjacent to the trail. In the summer the pillars are obscured by foliage.

Upper Merion History Signs



What's the water tank for? Most steam locomotives needed fuel and water to operate. Very few had steam supplied from an external source.

The fuel was usually coal, wood or oil. The fuel and water were usually carried in a tender. How was the tender refilled?

Fuel & Water

Upper Merion History Signs

Water Column

Upper Merion History Signs

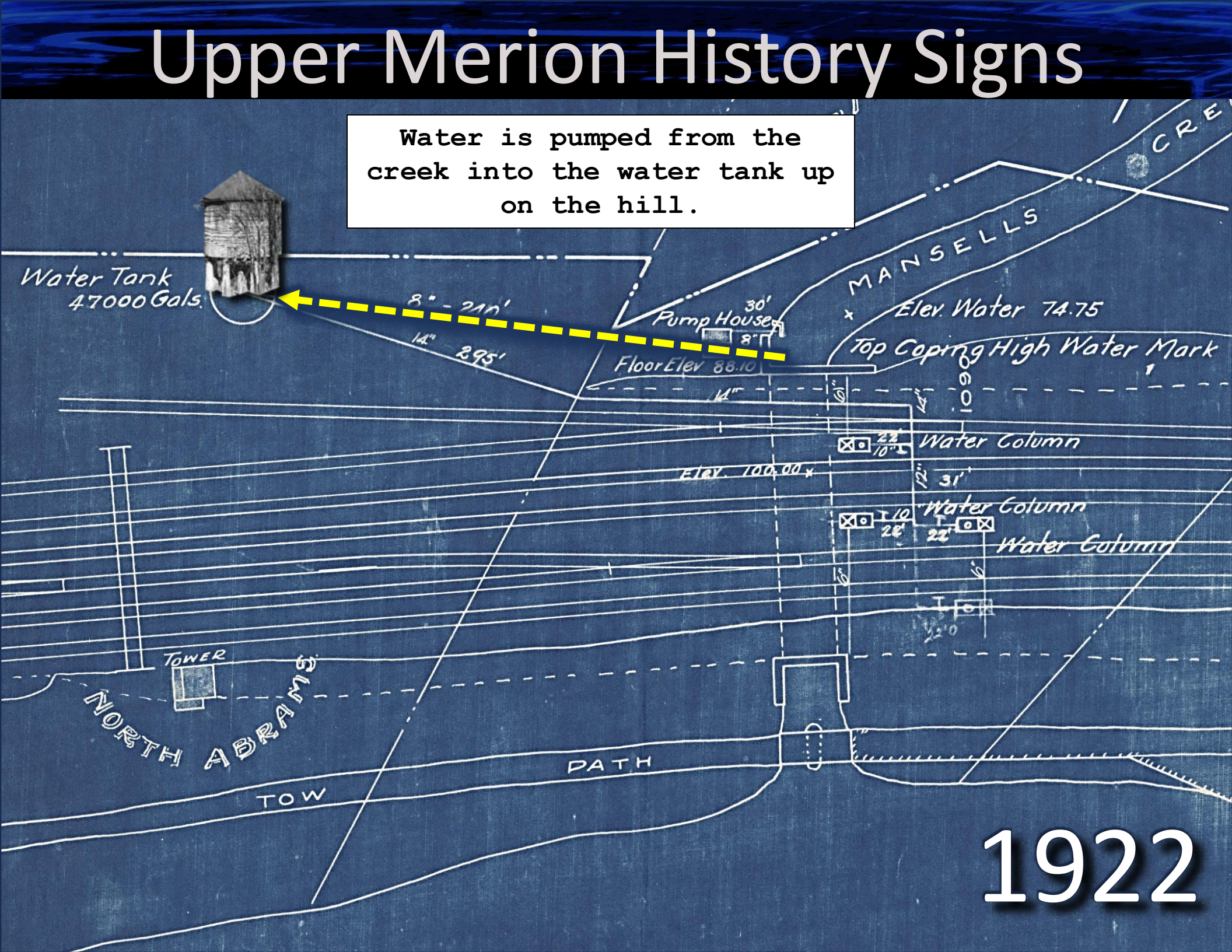
Strasburg Rail Road

Upper Merion History Signs

Schuylkill River West Trail

Why is north pointing down? The Reading Railroad's milepost zero was in the Reading Terminal. The milepost numbers become greater as the line travels upstream along the Schuylkill River. This map is oriented to match the milepost's numerical progression with our reading convention, left to right. This convention was followed by many railroads. Notice the location name is North Abrams.

Upper Merion History Signs



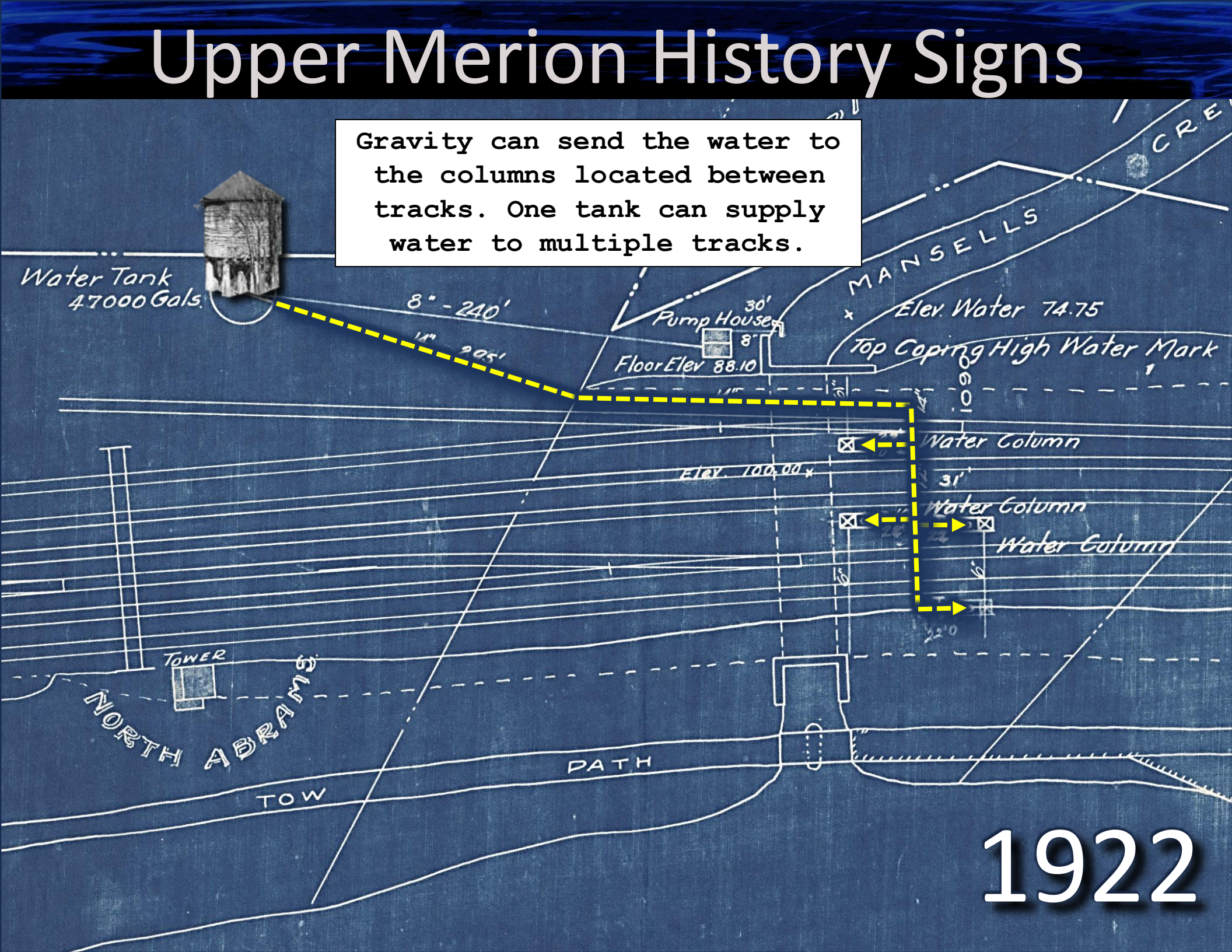
Upper Merion History Signs

Pump House

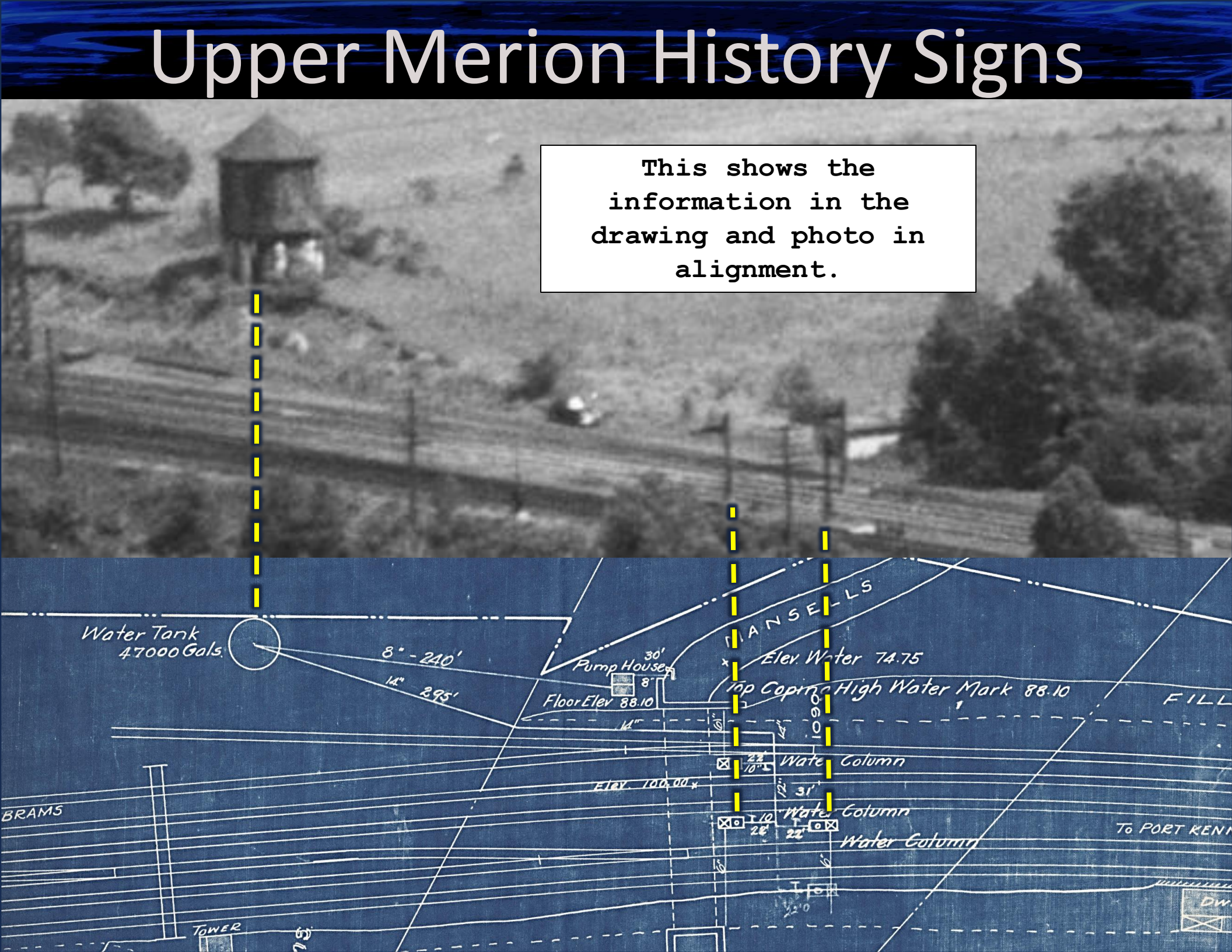
Water Inlet

The water inlet in the creek and the foundation of the pump house remain today.

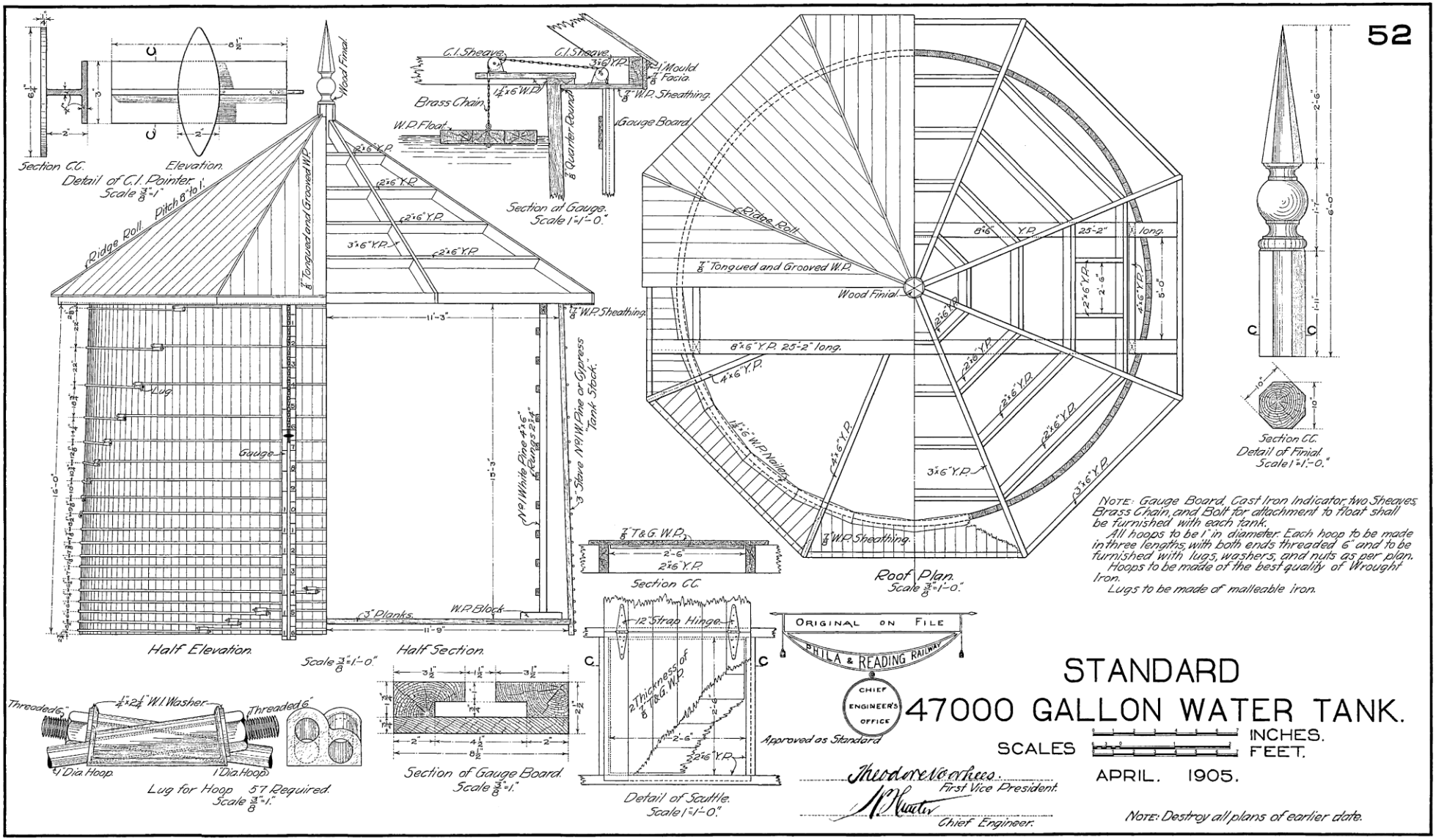
Upper Merion History Signs



Upper Merion History Signs



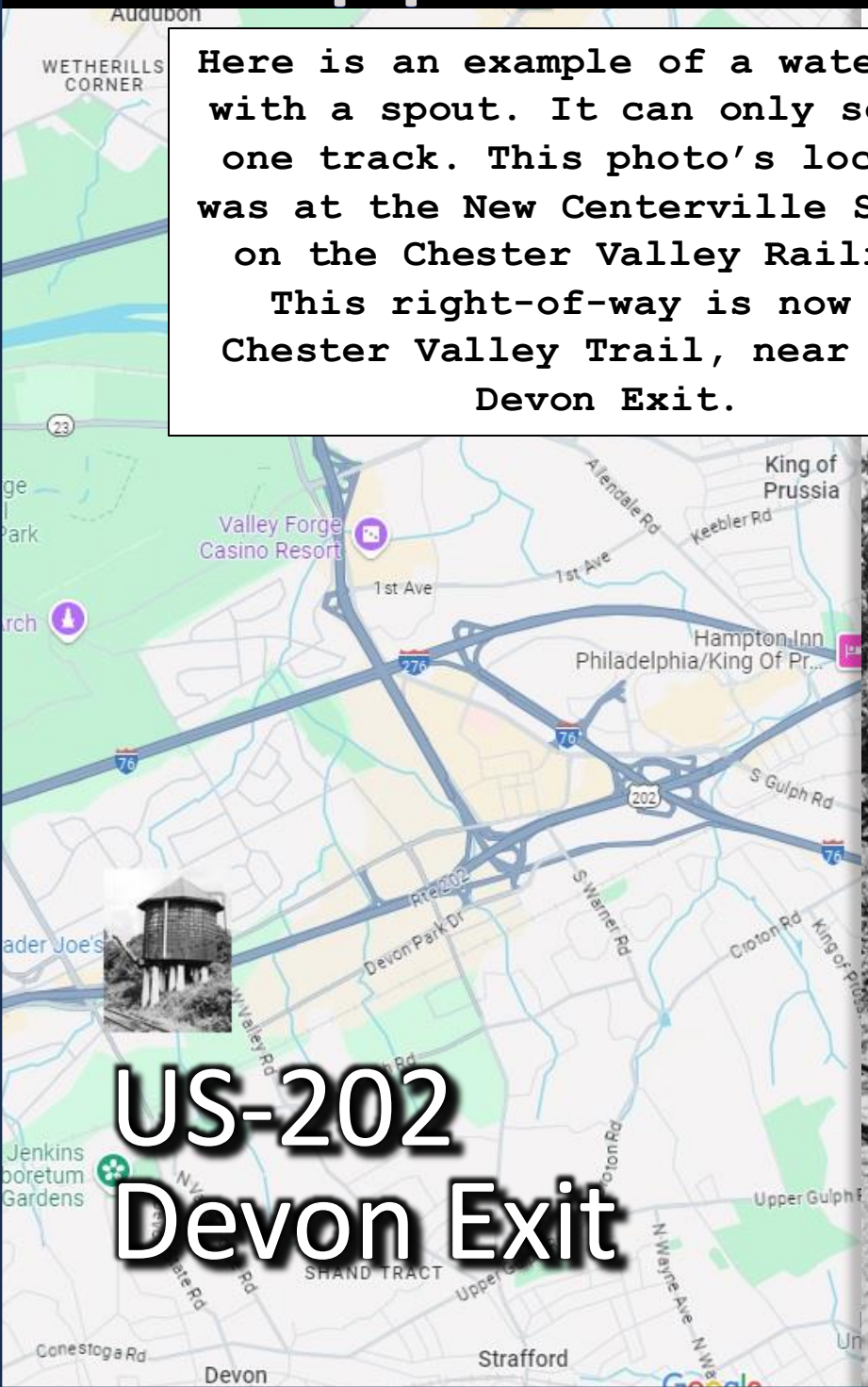
Upper Merion History Signs



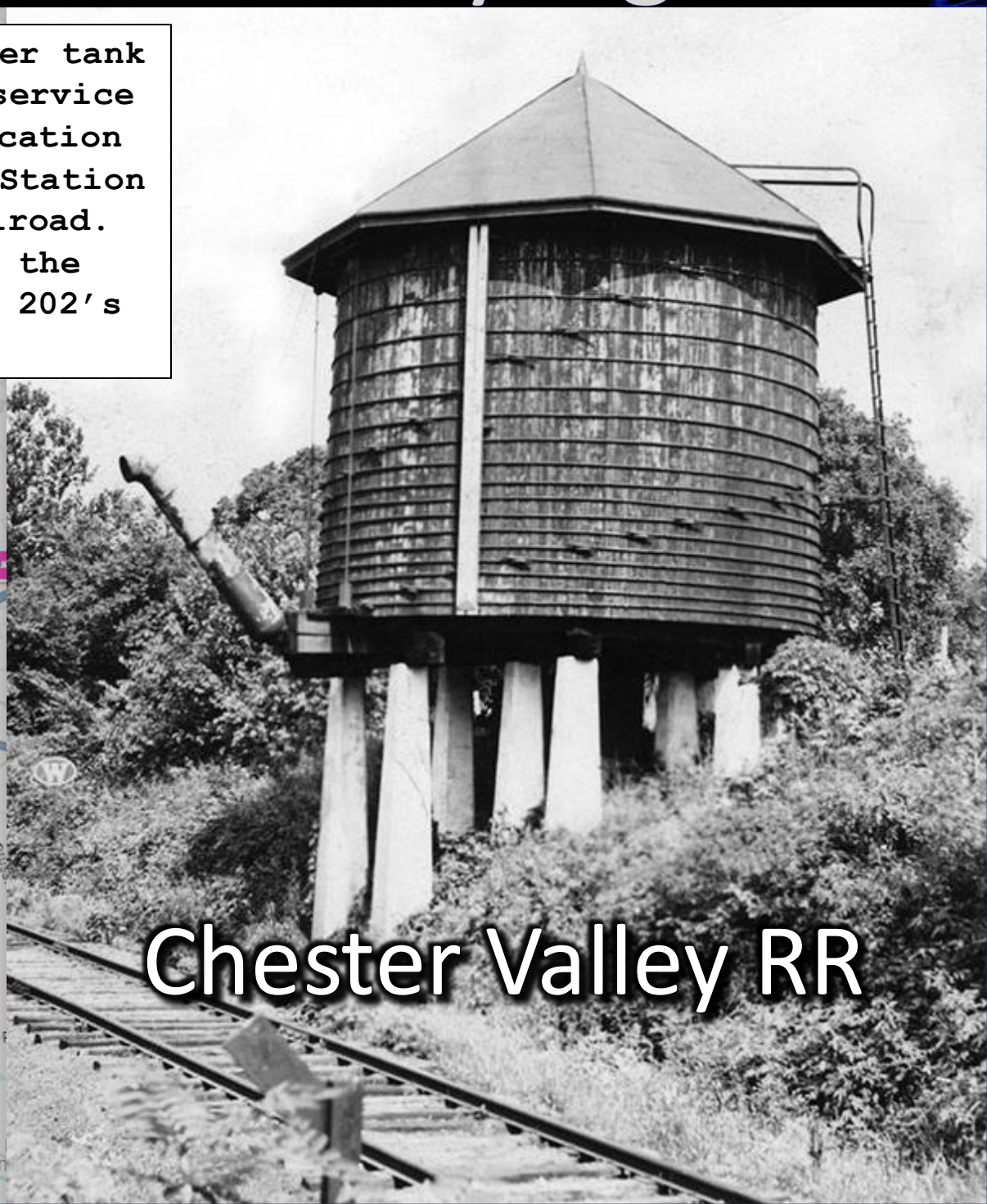
1905

Upper Merion History Signs

Here is an example of a water tank with a spout. It can only service one track. This photo's location was at the New Centerville Station on the Chester Valley Railroad. This right-of-way is now the Chester Valley Trail, near 202's Devon Exit.

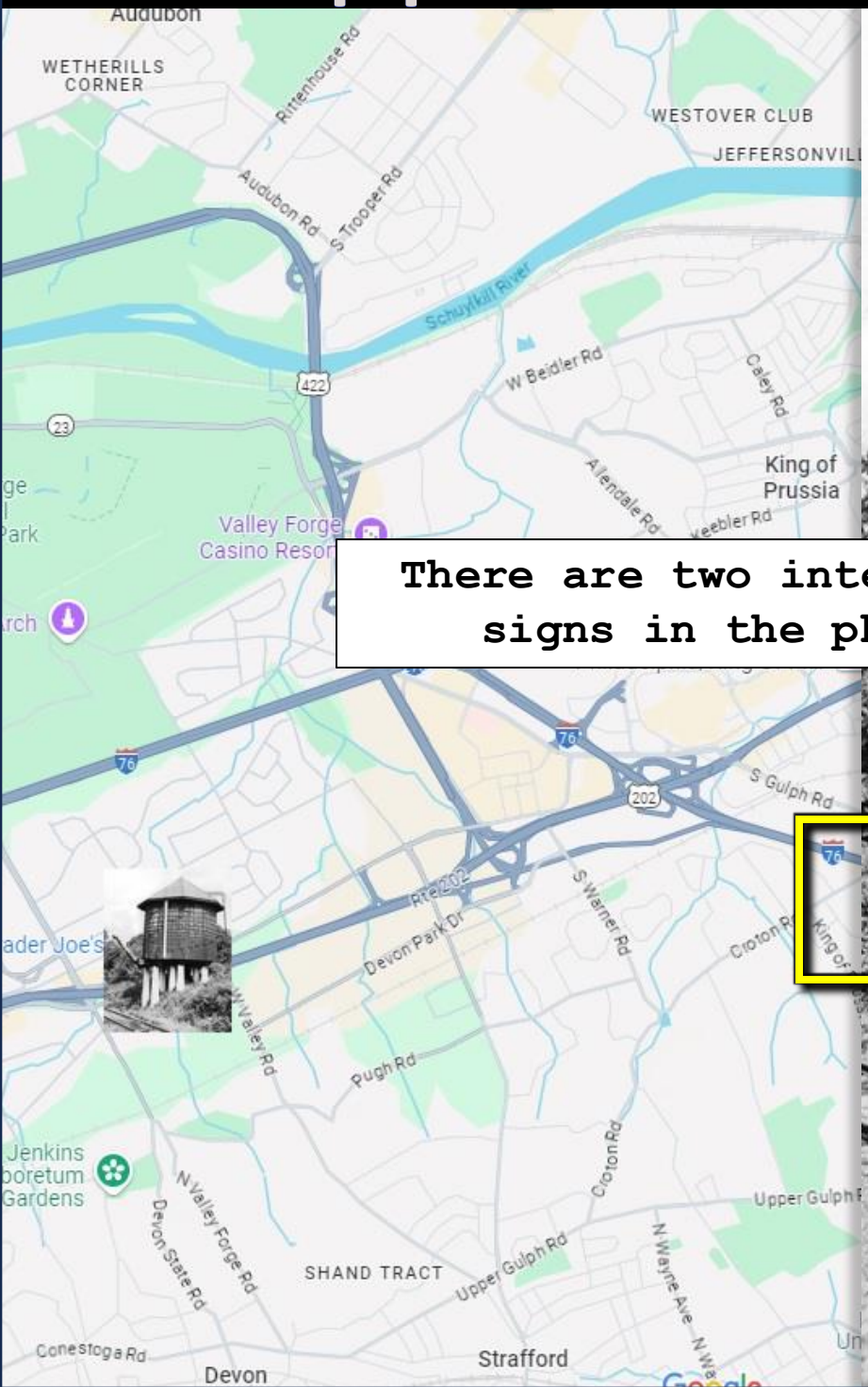


US-202 Devon Exit



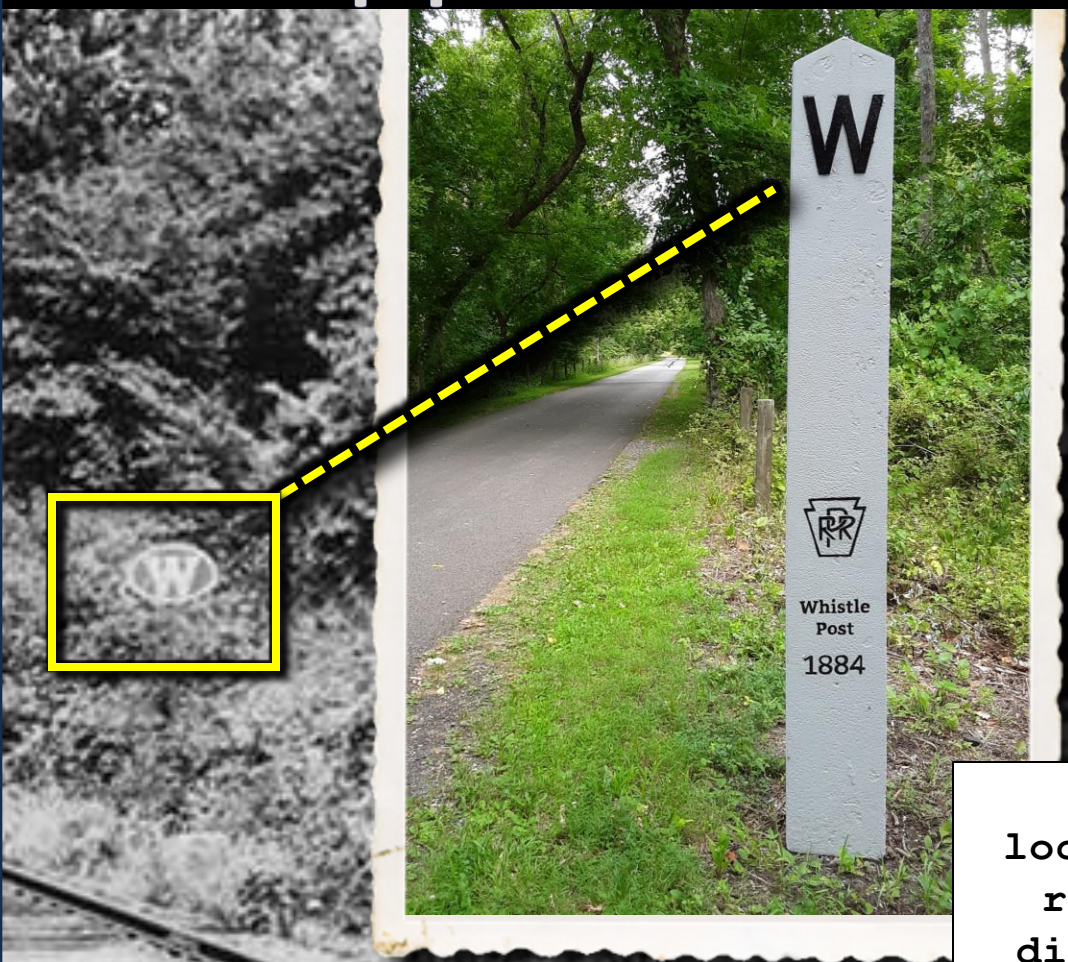
Chester Valley RR

Upper Merion History Signs



There are two interesting signs in the photo.

Upper Merion History Signs



The "W" is a Whistle Post marking a location where a locomotive engineer was required to sound the whistle. Modern diesel electric or electric locomotives have horns but the traditional "W" is still used.

A whistle post tells the engineer that the whistle or horn must be sounded in a standardized pattern of 2 long, 1 short, and 1 long blasts. The pattern must be repeated or prolonged until the head end of the train occupies the grade crossing.

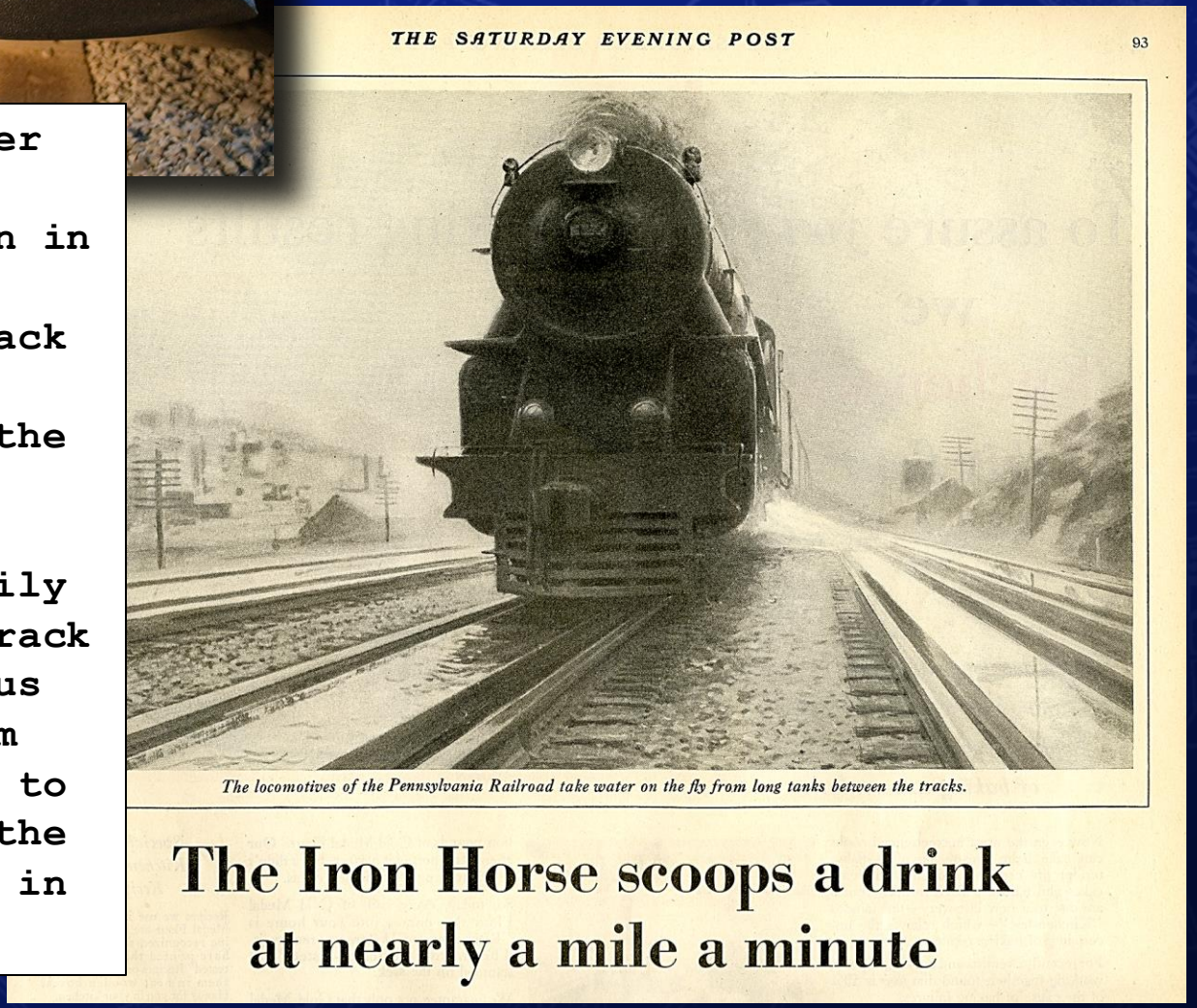
Upper Merion History Signs

The "hockey stick" is a Flanger Sign - A flanger is a piece of maintenance-of-way equipment with an adjustable blade that can drop below the rail head to scoop out snow clearing the flangeway. This blade needs to be raised to clear grade crossings, switch points and guard rails and so on. The flanger sign tells the flanger crew when to raise the blade.

Upper Merion History Signs

Another way of refilling a tender with water: scooping water. The tender's mechanical scoop, shown in the upper left photo, could be lowered while it passed over track pans. The forward motion of the scoop forced water up and into the tender's water tank.

This was done primarily on heavily trafficked main lines and the track section had to be level. The plus side of this more complex system was that the trains didn't need to stop. There were track pans on the Pennsylvania Railroad main line in St Davids.

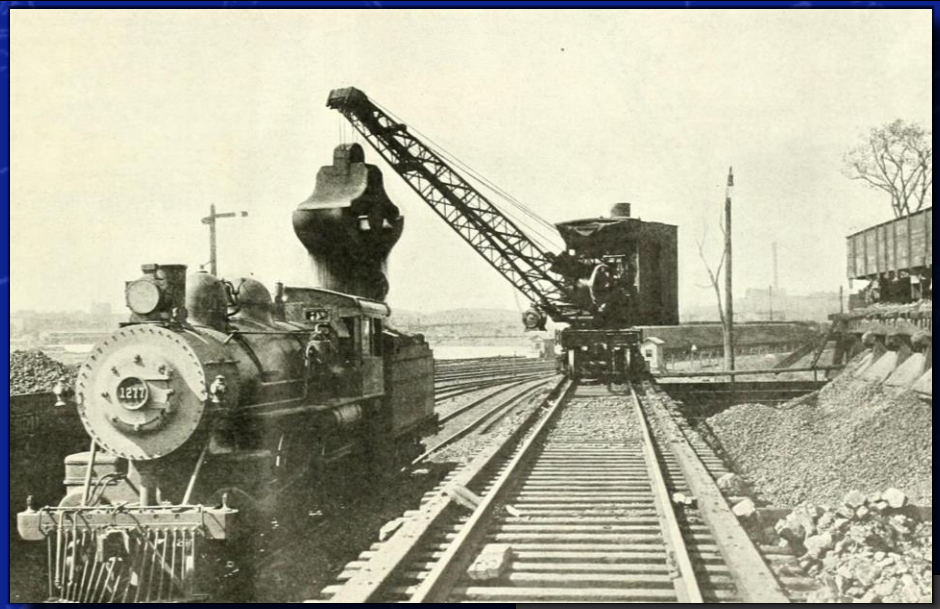


THE SATURDAY EVENING POST 93

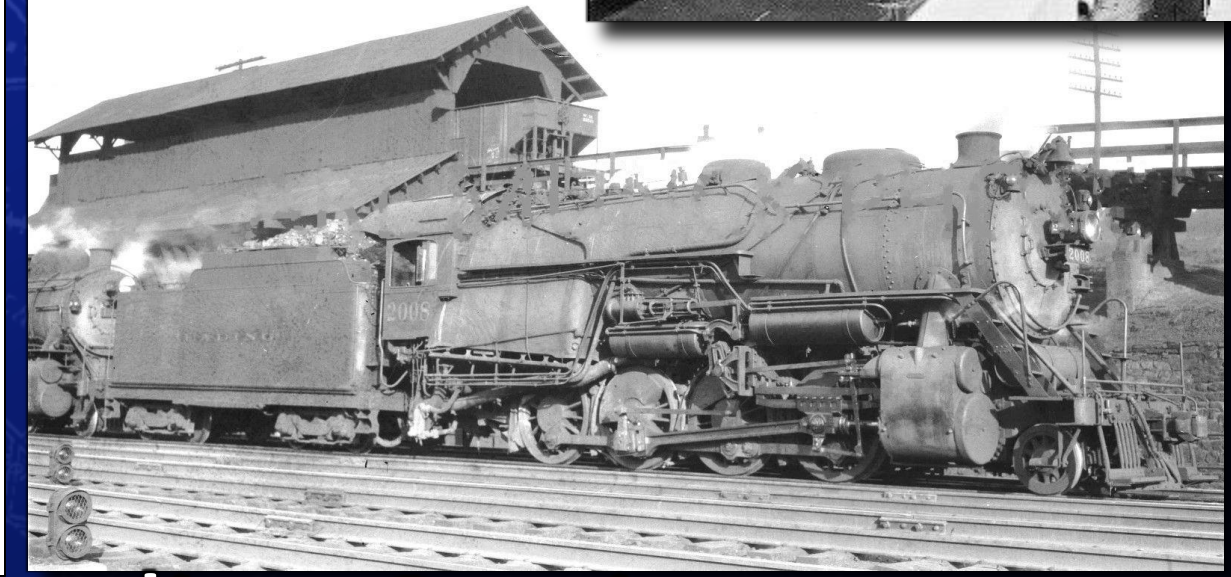
The locomotives of the Pennsylvania Railroad take water on the fly from long tanks between the tracks.

The Iron Horse scoops a drink at nearly a mile a minute

Upper Merion History Signs



Fuel also needed to be replenished. Here are three different methods for loading coal. The lower photo shows a former Reading Railroad coaling facility in Bridgeport, near today's Upper Merion Boathouse.

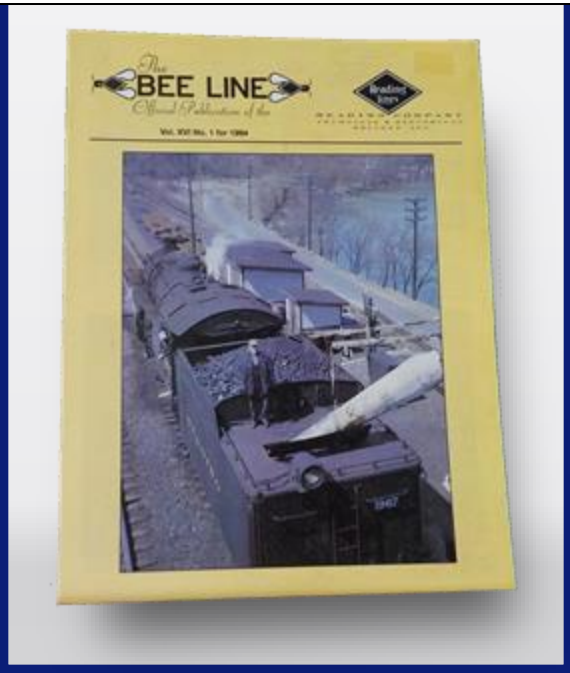


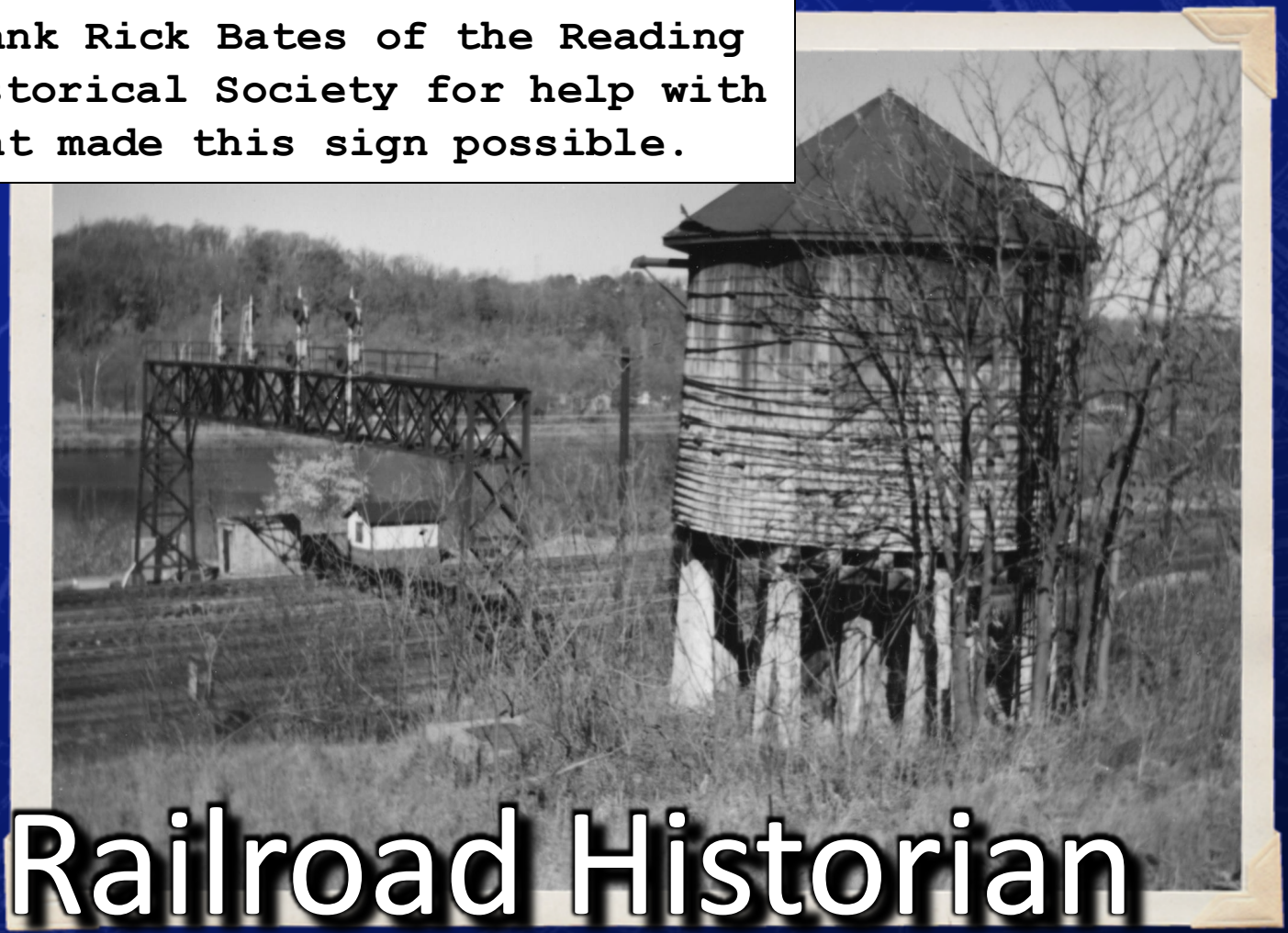
Coaling Stations

Upper Merion History Signs

The Trail Sign Project was conceived and directed by Upper Merion resident Neil Sardiñas, who also created the design for each of the signs.

Neil would like to thank Rick Bates of the Reading Company Technical & Historical Society for help with railroad history that made this sign possible.





Reading Railroad Historian

Reading Company Technical & Historical Society

Rick Bates