

Hopewell Valley Trolleys - Roadbed's Remains as of 1980

Hopewell / Pennington and Princeton / Lawrenceville

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The mania of trolley construction in the United States in the early 1900s included three lines servicing Hopewell, Princeton and Lawrence Townships from 1899 to 1940. This document discusses the history of the lines, and traces signs of their routes still found along the rights-of-way as of the early 1980s - especially earth embankments with stone or concrete piers since the steel tracks were torn up.

Hopewell Line - Trenton & Mercer County Traction Company (1902 - 1931)

Trenton to Pennington, Route 31 to length of Main St. and return to Route 31,
Rt. 518 Spur (Rt. 654) to Hopewell, Broad St. to terminus at Elm St.

- 1902 - Hopewell trolley line chartered as Trenton, Pennington and Hopewell Street Railway
- 1903 - Line reached Pennington, bought by Trenton Street Railway
- 1904 - Line reached Hopewell terminus at Elm Street
- 1910 - Trenton and Mercer County Traction Company formed from the Trenton Street Railway and the Mercer County Traction Company
- 12/1924 - Hopewell service ended, line removed from Pennington to Hopewell
- 7/1931 - Pennington service ended, all Trenton and Mercer County suburban lines discontinued

Princeton Line (southern route) - Trenton & Mercer County Traction Company (1899 - 1931)

University Place in Princeton to Alexander St., southwest to along Princeton Pike,
Fackler Road to Route 206 to Lawrenceville, south to Trenton

- 1899 - Mercer County Traction Company incorporated, tracks from Trenton to Lawrenceville
- 4/1901 - Service started to Princeton
- 1909 - Trenton Street Railway leased the Mercer County Traction Company
- 1910 - Trenton and Mercer County Traction Company formed from the two companies
- 7/1931 - Service discontinued from Trenton to Fackler Road; continued to Princeton until Oct.
- 1932 - All rails removed

Princeton Line (northern route) - Trenton-Princeton Traction Company (1899 - 1940)

Trenton Reading Interchange north to Lawrenceville, James Street (north of Main / Rt. 206)
Northeast toward Princeton, to Route 206 south of Bayard Lane hill,
Right on Witherspoon to terminus thirty feet south of Spring Street

- 1899 - Chartered as steam line, Trenton, Lawrenceville and Princeton Railroad
Track built to Stony Brook and operated with steam locomotives
- 1901 - Line bought for electrical traction; completed to northern Witherspoon Street in Princeton
- 10/1901 - Princeton Street Railway chartered to complete line to the center of town
- 7/1902 - Line completed to Witherspoon and Spring Street
- 1904 - All three companies were combined into New Jersey and Pennsylvania Traction Company
- 1922 - Princeton section began operating on its own as Trenton-Princeton Traction Company
- 1929 - Trenton-Princeton Traction Company purchased by the Reading Railroad
- 1939 - Track on Witherspoon Street in Princeton abandoned,
- 1940 - Track between Princeton and Lawrenceville torn up
Freight service into Lawrenceville continued by Reading Railroad diesels
- 1975 - Reading Railroad freight service into Lawrenceville ended with construction of I-295

Hopewell Valley Trolleys

The mania of trolley construction in the United States began in the early part of this century and left few areas untouched. Nonetheless, it is surprising to learn that Hopewell, Princeton and Lawrence Townships, all relatively level and possessing good highways and railroads, were served by two separate trolley systems.

Both companies were chartered within a couple of years of the turn of the century and served many of Mercer County towns and hamlets. Yet, with the dawn of the automobile, the trolley could not last. The move towards personal transportation caused ever-decreasing ridership. The Hopewell line was torn up in 1925, the Trenton and Mercer County Princeton line in 1931, and the Trenton-Princeton Traction line in 1940; all lines seeing less than forty years service.

Surprisingly enough, many relics and rights-of-way are still intact for both companies on all three lines. Most of the actual remains are earth embankments with stone or concrete piers, as the steel was apparently torn up to be used as scrap for World War II needs. Some of the Trenton and Mercer County lines and all of the Trenton-Princeton Traction line are on private property, but even with subsequent development, some signs of these routes can still be seen.



Postcard of trolley on West Broad Street in Hopewell, postmarked 1913 [MAT]

Roadbed's Remains as of 1980

Although the trolley routes of Hopewell and Princeton have long lain abandoned, much of that right-of-way is still visible. Today, when the personal automobile is a necessity and fuel resources are being depleted, electrical traction seems to be an intriguing alternative.

Running time from Hopewell to Trenton was forty minutes, while Trenton to Princeton was fifty minutes via the Trenton and Mercer County, and only thirty-five minutes on the North Princeton, or "Fast Line." Even today, in a time of imagined progress, the trolley schedule would be quite respectable.

Trenton and Mercer Traction Company - Hopewell Line

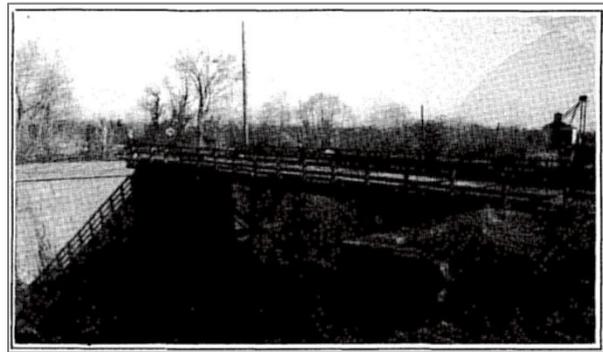
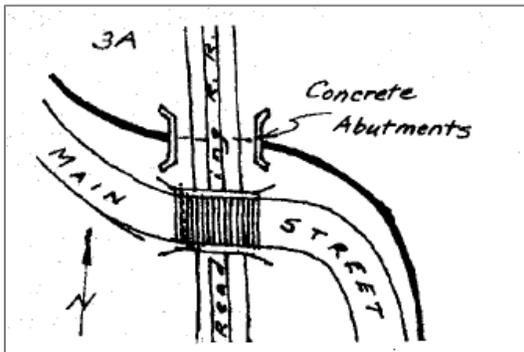
The Hopewell trolley line was chartered as the Trenton, Pennington and Hopewell Street Railway in 1902 and reached Pennington in 1903. Later that year it was bought by the Trenton Street Railway. In 1904, service reached its terminus at Elm Street in Hopewell.

Full use of the line continued until December, 1924, when track between Pennington and Hopewell was torn up. Cars to Pennington were continued until July 1931, the year all of the Trenton and Mercer County suburban lines were discontinued.

Hopewell Route as of 1980 - Through Pennington

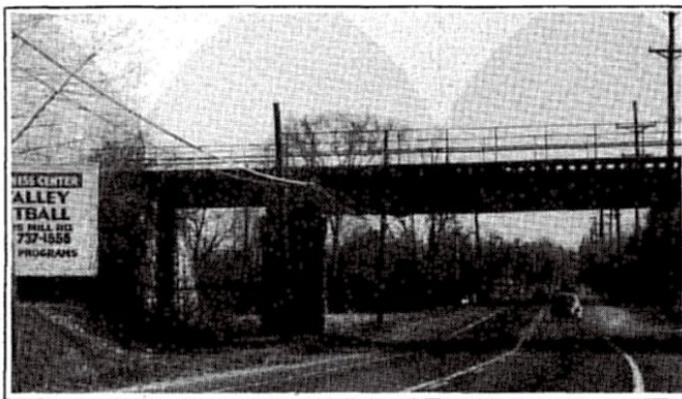
The trolley route from Trenton to Hopewell is not evident between Trenton and Pennington. The widening of Route 31 and the construction of the Pennington Circle cover what was the roadbed. Not until one reaches the southern part of Pennington is any trace found on Main Street near the Pennington Grammar School. The right-of-way proper ran just to the right of the trees in the center, curving out into the road further South.

At the extreme northern end of Pennington, where Main Street crosses the Reading Railroad, there are trolley bridge abutments still in evidence. Presumably a through truss or plate bridge was there as there is no clearance for substructure. The trolley continued on Main Street to the intersection with Route 31, where it ran on the East side of the road.



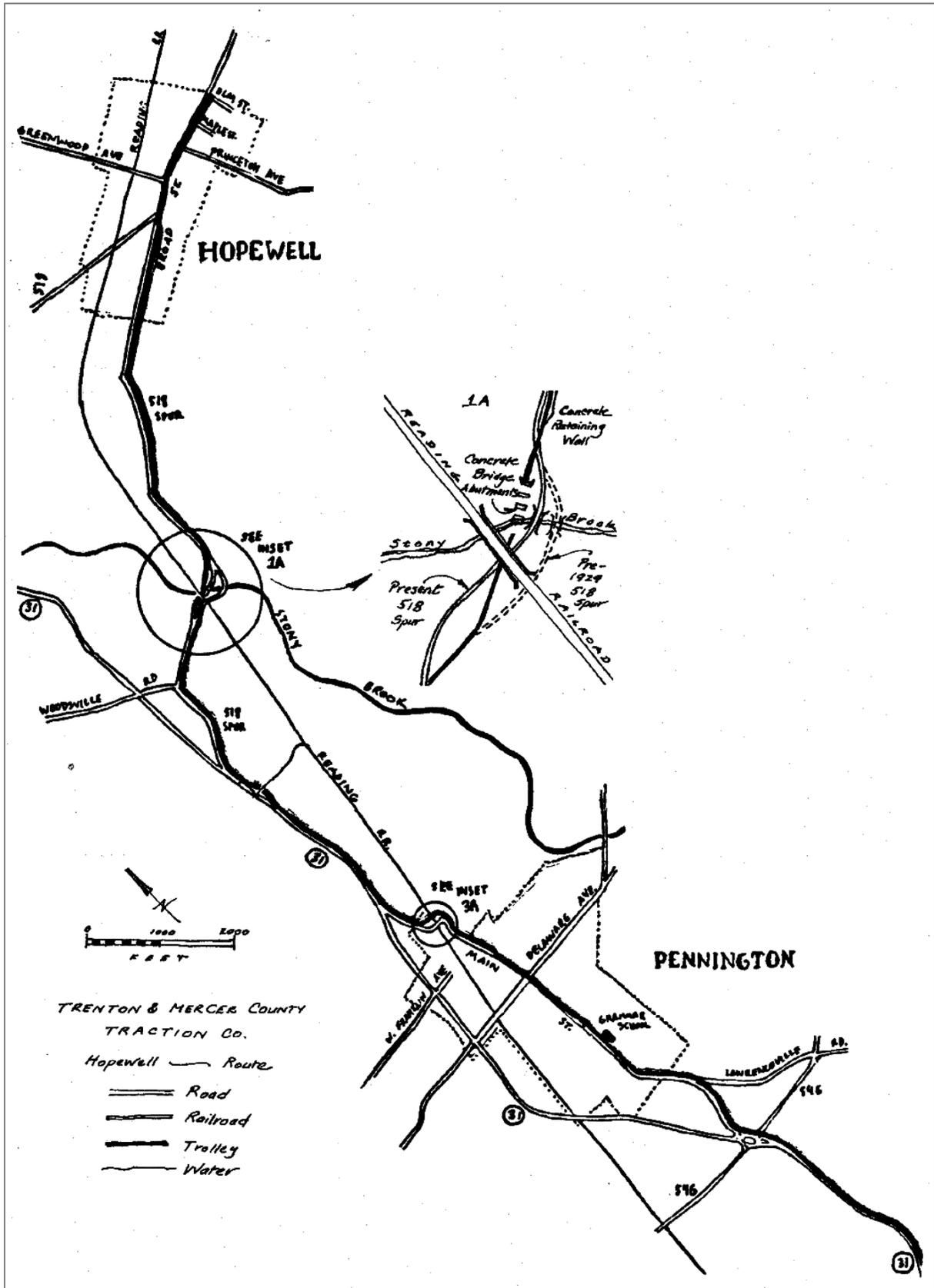
[3A] Beside the Main Street bridge over the Reading Railroad in Pennington, the abutments for the trolley still stand.

At the railroad bridge leading to the Pennington Trap Rock Company, there is a special portal for the trolley to pass. The girder is higher to allow the necessary clearance. One can also observe how earth was moved to provide room for the trolley roadbed forming an embankment.



The trolley portal beside Route 31 is still in evidence under the traprock railroad bridge.

Hopewell Route: Trenton & Mercer County Traction Co.



Hopewell Route as of 1980 - To Hopewell

From the Trap Rock Bridge to Hopewell the right-of-way follows the East side of Route 31 and Route 518 Spur. Near the Reading Railroad Bridge some abutments can be seen on the West side of the road. Before the age of the automobile the road to Pennington crossed the Reading tracks at grade several hundred feet to the South of where it does today. Some of the old road can be seen in this area today. Neither the highway bridge over Stony Brook built in 1929, nor the railway bridge, built in 1935, was there when the trolley bridge was built. The trolley bridge abutments can just be seen in the wooded region.

Just North of this site is the Glenmore siding which runs for a number of feet. The first abutments of the Stony Brook Bridge are just around the curve.



The Glenmore siding remains beside the Route 518 spur, not far from Hopewell.

From here to Hopewell there is nothing, save some small retaining walls for which there is no certainty of trolley ownership. There is a metal pole in front of the Hopewell Mobil Station which may or may not be a trolley support pole. The line ran up Broad Street and stopped at the corner of Broad and Elm Streets.

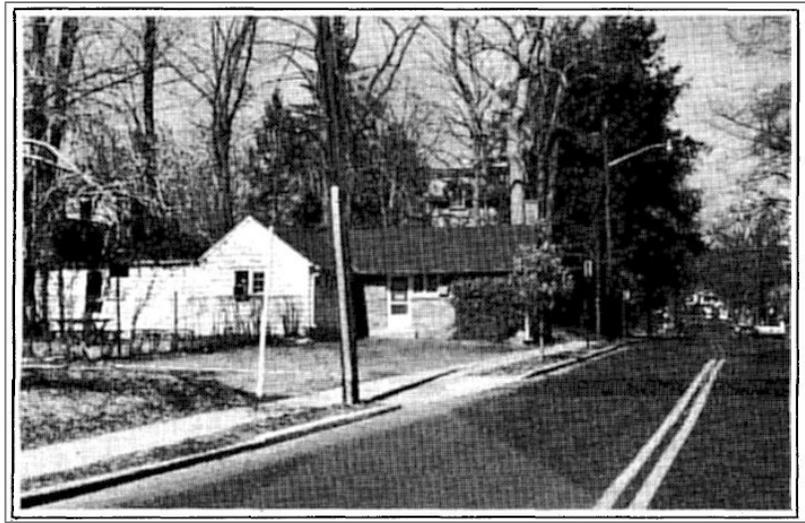
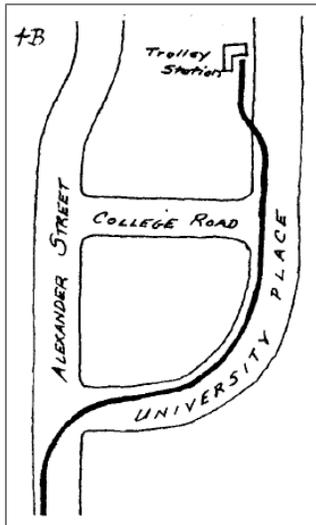
Trenton and Mercer County Traction Company - Princeton Line

The southern trolley route in Princeton was incorporated in 1899 as the Mercer County Traction Company, and tracks were laid from Trenton to Lawrenceville later that year. Service was brought to Princeton in April 1901, seven months before the rival Trenton-Princeton Traction Line. In 1909, the Trenton Street Railway leased the Mercer County Traction Company and in 1910, the two were combined into the Trenton and Mercer County Traction Company.

In July of 1931, service was discontinued from Trenton to Fackler Road, but trolleys ran from there to Princeton until October of that year. All rails were torn up by 1932. Even so, there are still many visible signs of this route.

Trenton & Mercer Co. Route as of 1980 - Princeton and South

The Princeton terminal of the Trenton and Mercer County Line still exists on University Place. A single track went from the street into the courtyard. From there the track went down the West side of University Place to Alexander Street. At the Princeton Inn the tracks went off the road on the West side to parallel Alexander Street.

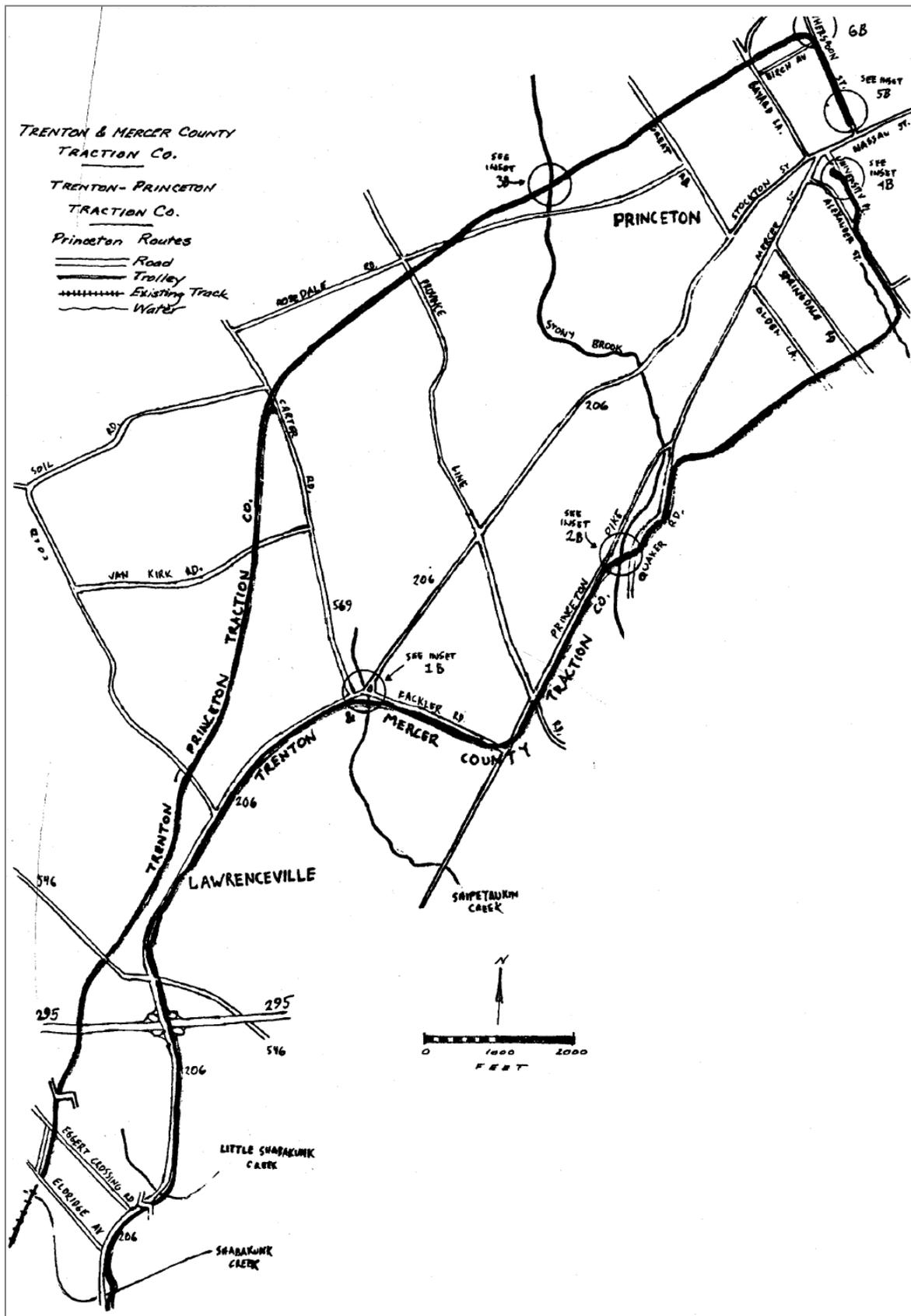


[4B] The Princeton terminal of the Trenton and Mercer County Traction Company still stands on University Place.

Roughly across from Faculty Road there is a rusty chain link fence which makes a gentle curve away from Alexander Street toward Trenton. This fence is on the top of an embankment which forms the Springdale Golf Course's southern border. Existing still in this area are the bridge abutments that flank a tributary of Stony Brook which runs parallel to Alexander Street. A little further along the southern border of the Golf Course there is additional evidence of the route in the form of a shallow gully about ten feet wide beside the embankment, and what may be ballast along the way.

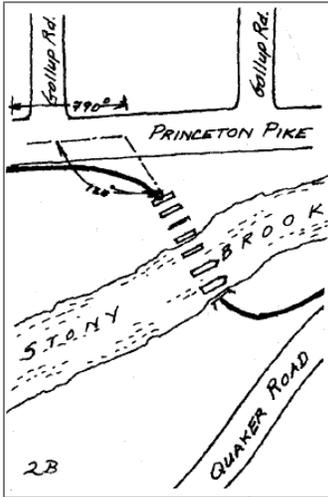
The line runs southwest along the old road to Princeton at the southern border of the Battlefield, clearly crossing Olden Lane near the Institute for Advanced Study. Skirting the Quaker Meetinghouse and running along Quaker Road for a short distance (there is evidence of roadbed on the eastern side), the line crosses the road and runs along Stony Brook. Its course can be traced by two small bridges and a line of stones which make up the roadbed. The divergence of Quaker Road and the raised ground of the roadbed can also be clearly seen.

Princeton Routes: Trenton-Princeton Co. and Trenton & Mercer Cty. Co.



Trenton & Mercer Co. Route as of 1980 - Princeton Pike South

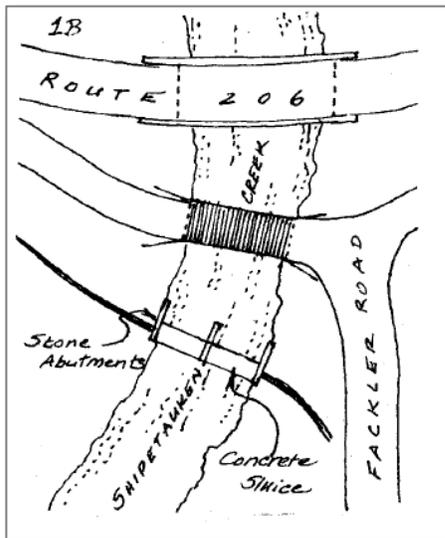
Considerably more dramatic are the remains of the bridge over Stony Brook. A straight line of eight stone and concrete abutments still stands.



[2B] Eight piers remain which used to carry the Trenton & Mercer County trolley across Stony Brook near Mercer Road.

From here the line proceeds along the East side of Princeton Pike (there was a small bridge along the way) up to Fackler Road. Here the line could have followed the road on either side. Maps or evidence from which to draw a conclusion could not be located.

However, at Fackler Road and Route 206 (Lawrenceville Road) there are remnants of a bridge. From this bridge to Lawrenceville the track ran on the Eastern side of Route 206.



[1B] Route 206, Fackler Road, and the trolley crossed the Shipetauken in close proximity.

Trenton & Mercer Co. Route as of 1980 - Lawrenceville / Route 206 to Trenton

In Lawrenceville, the tracks ran down the center of Route 206.

Just before the intersection of Route 206 and Route 514 at Lawrenceville School there is a curved section of pavement and curb which was old trolley passing siding.

Again following Route 206, the line proceeds as far as the Little Shabakunk Creek, where there are abutments still in place on either side.

Further South at the Shabakunk Creek there are more abutments and something else: the only piece of rail left on this trolley right-of-way, sticking out of the right side of the abutment.

From here the tracks went South into Trenton. All traces of the roadbed have been destroyed by existing construction in this built-up area.



The street and sidewalk still indicate the location of the Lawrenceville passing siding.

Trenton-Princeton Traction Company - Princeton Line

The northern trolley route from Trenton to Princeton was originally chartered in 1899 as the Trenton, Lawrenceville and Princeton Railroad, a steam line. Track was built to Stony Brook and operated with steam locomotives until 1901. In that year the line was bought by electrical traction interests. The line was completed to northern Witherspoon Street in Princeton by November. To extend it into the center of town, the Princeton Street Railway was chartered in October 1901. This line was completed in July of 1902. In 1904, all three companies were combined into the New Jersey and Pennsylvania Traction Company.

In 1922, the Princeton section began operating on its own as the Trenton-Princeton Traction Company. This company was purchased by the Reading Railroad in 1929. In 1939, the track on Witherspoon Street in Princeton was abandoned, and in 1940 the track between Princeton and Lawrenceville was torn up. Freight service into Lawrenceville was continued by the Reading Railroad's diesels until 1975, when 1-295 was built. Although no track exists between Lawrence Township and Princeton, many signs of the trolley still remain.

Trenton-Princeton Co. Route as of 1980 - Trenton to Lawrenceville

Quite a bit of what was the Trenton-Princeton Traction Company remains.

All the track between the Reading Interchange in Trenton (near Ingraham Avenue) and Eldridge Avenue (Lawrence Township) is still intact.

From Eldridge Avenue to Lawrenceville the line can be seen as a gravel road, as the tracks were removed in 1975.

In Lawrenceville the line ran one block to the North of Main Street (206) on James Street. Lawrenceville Fuel Company used the line for coal delivery until recent memory.



From Eldridge Avenue south the track of the Trenton-Princeton Traction Company is still in place.

Trenton-Princeton Co. Route as of 1980 - Lawrenceville to Princeton

As the line turns northeast out of Lawrenceville toward Princeton the line is more of a path crossing roads at odd angles. It can still be observed as it crosses Van Kirk Road. Running parallel to a line of utility poles, the right-of-way crosses Carter Road just South of Cold Soil Road. An extended driveway marks a considerable stretch of the line as it approaches its intersection with Province Line Road just South of Rosedale Road.

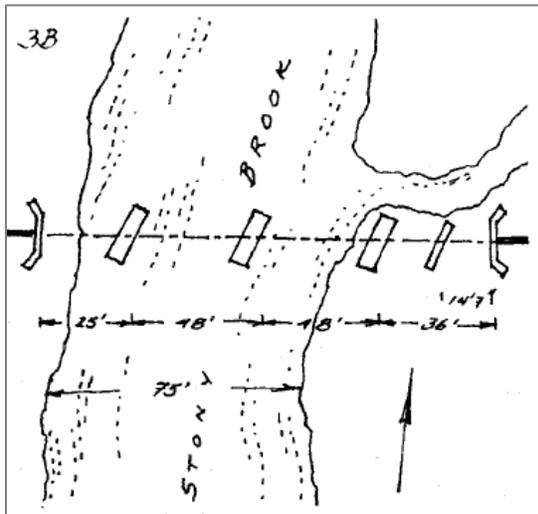
The line of trees and telephone poles that cuts off a triangular field of the Lahiere Farm is the trolley right-of-way at the corner of Rosedale and Province Line Roads. The line crosses Rosedale Road and proceeds through the Brookstone housing development.



At the corner of Province Line and Rosedale Roads only a hedgerow, which cuts diagonally across a field, indicates the route.

Trenton-Princeton Co. Route as of 1980 - Approaching Princeton

The Stony Brook crossing of this line can be seen from Johnson Park Road. Three bridge abutments and the embankments on either side can be easily observed. The only practical use nowadays of the trolley right-of-way in this area is the bike path which runs between Johnson Park Road and The Great Road.

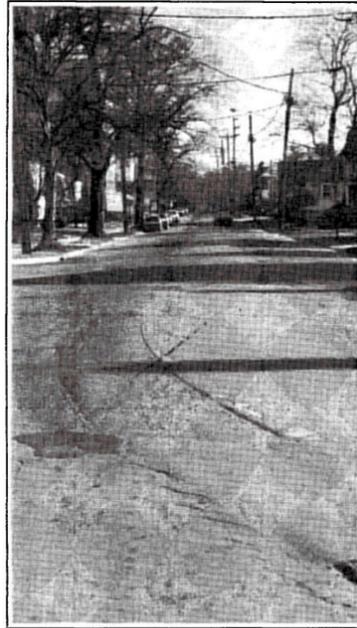
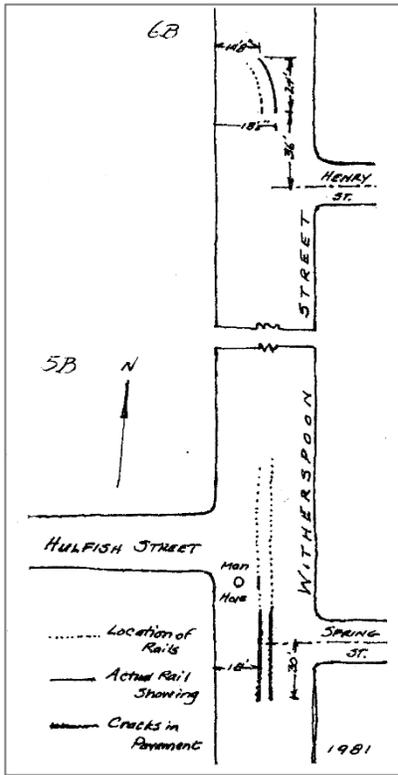


[3B] A series of pilons defines the route of the Johnson Line across Stony Brook near Jackson Park School.

Trenton-Princeton Co. Route as of 1980 - Princeton

The line intersects Route 206 at the foot of Bayard Lane hill, running along the southern border of Community Park and under the Princeton Packet building before joining Witherspoon Street. As the tracks curve into this street to head South into town, the tracks can be clearly recognized emerging from the pavement.

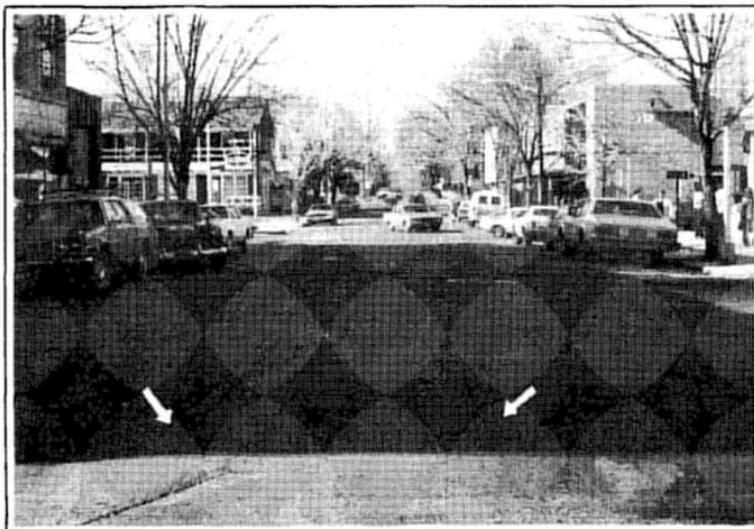
Near Quarry Street, one trolley pole remains beside the cemetery fence. At Hullfish and Witherspoon Streets another rail has broken through the pavement and about a five foot length is visible. The end of the trolley line in Princeton is about thirty feet South of Spring Street. This is the terminus and the actual end of the line which can be observed as cracks in the blacktop above the rails.



[6B] Near the Princeton Packet's offices on lower Witherspoon Street the track can be plainly observed.



The last pole near Quarry Street.



[5B] The Johnson Line's terminus at Witherspoon and Spring Street was apparent until March 1982.