

History of the Odenton MARC Station

The Odenton MARC station was built in 1943 by the Pennsylvania Railroad for servicemen and women at Fort George G. Meade as well as Odenton area passengers. It was designed by Lester C. Tichy, chief architect for the renowned industrial designer Raymond Loewy, who had streamlined Pennsylvania Railroad locomotives and cars. Tichy's inspiration for the modern station was the "prairie style" architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright.

Train service at Odenton had begun in 1872 when the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad (later Pennsylvania Railroad and now Amtrak/MARC) was constructed. Trains ran to Baltimore and Washington with many local stops. An earlier passenger station stood on the east side of the tracks. Until 1935, Odenton was a busy junction with additional train service to Annapolis, Fort George G. Meade, and Annapolis Junction on the Washington, Baltimore and Annapolis Electric Railroad.

Odenton Road once crossed the tracks and was the town's main street as well as a busy thoroughfare from Annapolis to Frederick. A town of several hundred people grew near the crossing, including general stores, churches, a school, and homes of railroad workers. Today Odenton's historic district includes many well-preserved buildings dating from the 1870s to the 1950s. The 1917 Odenton Bank, owned and restored by the Odenton Heritage Society, is a community museum and coffee shop serving MARC passengers.

Over the years, the railroads serving Odenton offered faster, more frequent service. The steam-powered Pennsylvania Railroad was electrified in 1935, and high-speed trains were added. Four years later, Odenton Road was severed at the tracks for safety reasons, and a pedestrian underpass was built. But train ridership declined in the 1960s and 1970s as more highways were built and the Penn Central Railroad declared bankruptcy. Amtrak acquired the Penn Central's Northeast Corridor, improved the tracks, increased speed, and closed all remaining road crossings.

More commuters rode trains by the 1980s as suburbs grew. The Maryland Transit Administration coordinated improvements in local train equipment, ticketing, train frequency, stations, platforms, parking, and landscaping. In 1990, acknowledging the Odenton passenger station's place in history and in the community, MTA restored the exterior to its historic 1943 appearance, enlarged the waiting room, and updated interior features.