

FAHP News, September 28, 2015

Tidbits from Years Ago: About 20 of us in the Stanley driving program have just completed a long-weekend mini-tour to the Dover area, which brought to mind some early stories and childhood memories.

We traveled the tree-shaded State Street in Dover from north to south, and it's a pleasant change from the busy highways around the state Capital, now with a population of 40,000 residents. Actually State Street was a portion of the 1918-1919 Coleman DuPont Highway, most of which was an 18-foot-wide concrete road from Claymont in the north to Selbyville in the south, a distance of over 100 miles. Until the mid-1930s, my parents used State Street to and from Rehoboth, where they had a summer home after 1927. It was the only way to go. In those days, about ½ mile south of the center of town on the east side of State Street were at least two large homes, each with lengthy front lawns full of fresh garden produce for sale, especially in late summer. My mother always had to stop, sample, and buy.

On our return from Dover on Sunday, we stopped in Odessa, a tiny historic village of about 500 residents and several historic homes open to the public. Before there was a settlement at Middletown, four miles to the west, Odessa was a thriving river port, then called Cantwell's Bridge. Grain and timber were shipped down the Appoquinimink Creek to the Delaware Bay and then north to Wilmington and Philadelphia. In the early 19th century, a man named Daniel Corbit profited from this busy trade and, along with his neighbors, built some fine and stately homes on the bluff above the navigable creek. The original Odessa was a busy Ukrainian port on the Black Sea, so about 1840 Cantwell's Bridge was renamed Odessa. My maternal grandparents were married in Odessa's new Drawyers Presbyterian Church in 1872, no longer in existence (Old Drawyers is a historic church and burial ground about ¾ mile north of town).

When the Delaware Railroad was built from Wilmington to Delmar (and soon to Salisbury) in 1859, it by-passed Odessa, and Middletown prospered along the tracks that opened up lower Delaware to outside commerce. With river traffic declining in favor of the railroad, Middletown soon became the larger and more vibrant of the two towns. A four-mile electric trolley line was built from the Port of Odessa to the railroad at Middletown about 1907, but it met with limited success and lasted less than five years. When the DuPont Highway was built in 1918, it by-passed Middletown in favor of Odessa. Nevertheless, in the 1930s Middletown maintained a population of about 1,200, whereas Odessa was not more than 400. Today, Middletown counts 20,000, more or less.

About 1920, my mother's bachelor brothers (both were married late in life), Eugene H. Shallcross (1883-1966) and Edwin E. Shallcross (1891-1995), got a government contract to build a four-mile road across the marsh from Port Penn to Delaware City. Earlier attempts had met with little success, and the area was known to contain quick-sand, which some accounts claimed could swallow up a team of mules. They basically built the road on pilings, and to get the heavy timbers in place, they constructed a temporary railroad across the marsh. They rented a "dinkey," a tiny steam locomotive, and several four-wheeled flat cars to move the material. Other details on how they completed the project are unknown to me, but three miles of the present Delaware Route 9, over which the Stanley cars passed just south of the Reedy Point Canal Bridge yesterday, is the successor to my uncles' road.

Work Report: On Tuesday, September 22, 11 volunteers were on hand for the work session: Anne Cleary, Brent McDougall, Dennis Tiley, John Bacino, Dave Leon, Bill Schwoebel, Steve Bryce, Dennis Dragon, Bob Jordan, Mark Russell, and Tom Marshall (in charge).

The rear driveway was cut out at the A.V.R.R. grade crossing, new cypress ties were cut, and flashing prepared for the rebuilding of this crossing. The new air line to the whistle on "Little Toot" was completed, utilizing the crossing to get under the driveway. Several one-gallon cans were filled with hexane in preparation for the Dover trip in six Stanleys Sept. 25-27 (only five actually made the trip). The leather door-holds on the Model 87 were repaired and replaced.

The running board moldings are now completely disassembled on the 1937 Packard. The Cretors popper is coming together and looks spectacular on its new and correct “antique” cart.

On Thursday, September 24, fourteen 14 were on hand, viz: Dave Leon (in charge), Edwin Paschall, Tim Ward, Steve Bryce, Dan Citron, Ted Kamen, Bill Schwoebel, Bob Jordan, Brent McDougall, Jim Personti, Tom Marshall, Richard Bernard, Mark Bodenstab, and Bob Stransky.

Six Stanleys were fully prepped for the upcoming Dover weekend. More work was done on the Cretors popper. It is expected that our newly restored beauty will be functional by the Steamin’ Halloween event on October 25. The rebuilt throttle was installed in the smoke box of Locomotive 401, and the interior of the smoke box was re-assembled. Four packets were placed in the six cars going to Dover for the long weekend. Several volunteers continued track work in preparation for our October 4 event.

On Saturday, September 26, Brent McDougall and Anne Cleary back-filled a trench and packed the ballast on the rear curve of the A.V.R.R. Locomotive 401 was then fired up to test the track and the new throttle installation. Both need slight adjustments, but all looks good for the Steamin’ Sunday 10/4.

The Model 735 Stanley was not taken to Dover as planned, but the other five cars made the trip and in grand style, with 13 Stanley operators in varying categories of expertise. The boiler was leaking as the 735 was being fired up Friday morning, so it was left behind.

I want to personally thank Chazz and Susan Salkin for making our time in and around Dover so enjoyable. Chazz was responsible for recommending Home 2 Suites for our two-night stay, and we found it perfect for our needs. He also provided road maps for our tour kits. Susan took six of our ladies on a special tour of Dover’s downtown attractions on Saturday, which was much appreciated.

Special thanks are also due Mike Leister, director of the Air Mobility Command Museum on the Dover Air Force Base, for the special “inside” tour he gave those of us who visited Saturday afternoon with our five Stanleys. The huge C-5A transport is the largest Air Force plane on exhibit at any museum in the world!