

June 12, 2006

Hello, Steam Team:

The bridge across Red Clay Creek has been the center of Yorklyn for 200 years. It divided Christiana Hundred from Mill Creek Hundred, the Snuff Mills from the Paper and Fiber Mills, and for a time the Conrad School District from the Alexis I. duPont School District. Residents on one side of the bridge voted one place; those on the other voted another place (for a time it was Centerville vs. Hockessin). Coming from Hockessin, it is the end of Yorklyn Road; on the other side is Creek Road or Route 82.

Through much of the 19th century and until 1929 the "bridge" was a wooden covered bridge. I can barely remember riding through the bridge with my father. The story goes that the snuff mill "boys" would challenge the fiber mill "boys" and all kinds of fights took place in the bridge (the snuff mill was in Christiana Hundred; the fiber mill in Mill Creek). Ed Dennison had a store near the railroad on the fiber mill side, and soon Grover C. Gregg opened another. Not to be outdone, Charles J. Gormley, later of Hockessin, operated a store at the snuff mill during and just after World War I. Edward J. McGovern then had a small store near the bridge on the fiber mill side.

The steel truss bridge that replaced the covered bridge at the same location has been rebuilt and strengthened a few times, but it still dates from 1929. Tractor-trailers have not treated the wing walls kindly. During the depression and through the 1940's, a favorite occupation of local teen-age boys was to sit on the wing walls of the bridge and watch the traffic pass. We would always wave and they would wave back. Yorklyn was a town where everyone acknowledged everybody else (usually by throwing up your hand), whether you knew them or not. Although 2/3 of the population lived in company houses, it was a very friendly place and after 1930 nearly everyone dealt at Gregg's store and Gregg's became the social center of the tiny community.

Sometimes the post office was at the fiber mill and sometimes at the snuff mill, depending on who was postmaster. The snuff mill provided the most ornate post office which was housed in a tiny brick Victorian building that had served as the paymaster's shack. Postmasters Philip E. Touhey and Edward "Ned" Touhey held forth here from 1933 until 1946, and here the post office remained until Grover C. Gregg, Jr. moved it to Gregg's store about 1950. On the creek just above the bridge, ice hockey was a favorite sport when there was enough ice, which could not be guaranteed every winter. Immediately below the bridge above the dam, the mill race for the snuff mill branched off to the east, and ran through the several brick buildings before discharging back into the creek as the tail race.

A nineteenth-century landmark, the "Boarding House" was built as a residence for the superintendent of the snuff mill, very close to the bridge on the snuff mill side. It was so close to Creek Road that cars often hit one of the porch posts. Mr. Durham, who held this job, lived here with his family in the last years of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth. It was said that he ate roach sandwiches, with a good supply of mustard included (a lot of mustard was used in the manufacture of snuff). I can't provide the recipe. When W. W. Bissett became superintendent about 1904, a new frame dwelling was built for him near the old Garrett mansion (now owned and occupied by Brian and Linda Woodcock), and Durham's home became the "Boarding House". In the 1920's and until it was torn down in 1937 a couple named Jackson operated it as a boarding house for single men, most of whom worked at the snuff mill. The door to the ice house for this building can still be seen in the bank along Route 82.

A busy week is upon us (where have you heard that before?). Two of our National First Prize winners from the 1950's will be entered in the Grand National event to be staged by the Brandywine Region, AACA, at Dover Downs on Saturday, June 17. Rose Ann Hoover is chairperson for this event, and most of our BRAACA members will be heavily involved in running the show. On Friday, the 16th, a small contingent from Dover will come by bus to Auburn Heights, where we will run one train, the Mountain Wagon, the electric car, and will have the museum open. Our visitors will enjoy a box lunch while on the grounds, and we expect them to be here from 10:45 until about 2:00. In addition, a group of about 12 retirees from Philadelphia will visit at the same time. We believe we have enough volunteers to handle this day.

We are preparing 3 cars for the Steam Car Tour in Ohio, June 18-23 (and one more, the Model 725, has already gone under the care of John and Mark Hopkins. Two of these cars, the Models 76 and 87, are the ones also going to Dover, and our 607 will join them for next week's tour. In all, we expect to have 4 steamers and 16 active volunteers (including family members) representing FAHP. Material for a new vaporizer is promised tomorrow, which will be vital to getting the 87 operational in a very few days.

We have been promised by Bellevue State Park some additional wooden cars for our "Little Toot" train, and Willard Robinson has volunteered to restore these for our use behind the locomotive built by Dale and Teddy Simpkins, which has proven to be a big hit.

Last Saturday the Models 76 and 607 went to Wilhelm's Gas Engine and Tractor Show with Butch Cannard, Bob Reilly, Cameron and Colin McDougall, and myself attending, and on Sunday the 76, the 740, and the Rauch & Lang electric went to the New Garden Air Show accompanied by Butch, Emil Christofano, Jerry Novak, Bob Reilly, Walter Higgins, and myself, all without incident.

Anne Cleary needs you to think seriously about Independence Day and the cars you may wish to take to the July 4th parade in Hockessin. She would like to give Jean Toman, chairperson of the parade, an idea of how many may be coming. As to work sessions on June 20 and 22, they may be canceled since several volunteer leaders will be in Ohio, but if possible Jerry Lucas and others may let you know if some important work may be taking place- please stay tuned.. We MAY reach 100 members very soon; Bob Reilly tells me we now have 98! Best wishes. Tom