

Local Roads and When They Were Built: (A similar article appeared in the “News” of March 23, 2009).

Available road maps of northern New Castle County are available from 1849, 1868, and 1884 (all dates approximate), and in addition we have C. A. Weslager’s monograph “140 Years Along Old Public Road” published in 1962. I have deduced the following:

About 1730, early Quaker farmers around present-day Hockessin encouraged John Garrett, the first settler along nearby Red Clay Creek to build a grist mill, harnessing the waters of this fast-moving stream. We believe there was a trail following the creek that connected present-day Kennett Square with the Auburn Mill, the name coined by Garrett for his important location. Garrett’s customers, however, were mostly in the direction of Hockessin Meetinghouse, so a hilly cart road was built from the mill to a junction with another trail that gained in importance and is now known as Old Wilmington Road. The cart road became known as Old Public Road. As the Garrett family in Auburn shifted to manufacturing snuff, the new location of the snuff mills, ½ mile downstream from the original grist mill, had no easy road over which they could receive raw materials or ship out the finished product. This condition existed well into the 19th century.

The Newport-to-Gap Turnpike, built to accommodate Conestoga Wagons from the fertile fields of Lancaster County to the wharves on the Christina River (for shipment to Philadelphia) was opened shortly after 1800. Less than 20 years later the beginnings of Brandywine Springs Park with its large frame hotel was built along this road, a location easily accessible by river boat and a short carriage ride. The road passed through present-day Hockessin on what is known as Old Lancaster Pike. Until the mid-19th century, however, the only connection between Old Wilmington Road and Newport-Gap Pike was the northeastern end of Valley Road. The Limestone Road, connecting farms on high ground west of and parallel to Newport-Gap Pike, was an early route favored by some teamsters with Conestoga Wagons.

In September, 1777, when the American Revolution touched the area, British and Hessian troops under Generals Howe and Cornwallis marched through en-route from the mouth of the Elk River near present-day Elkton with the objective of capturing Philadelphia. With a skirmish at Cooch’s Bridge, they passed near Newark and up to the Limestone Road. The Hessian commander Knyphausen continued north past New Garden, torching many buildings in his wake. Howe and Cornwallis turned toward the east and followed Southwood Road into present-day Hockessin, as most of Valley Road did not yet exist. They encamped for the night in and around Hockessin Meetinghouse, which was the center of activity for the surrounding area at that time. George Washington kept his Continental Army between the British and Philadelphia until they clashed at Chadds Ford, where the Continentals were beaten back and the British soon took Philadelphia. It’s thought that Washington’s forces marched from the Stanton area and followed Red Clay Creek to Mount Cuba, after which they followed a trail called Pyle’s Ford Road until it reached the Brandywine valley near the present-day Meadows-on-the-Brandywine.

In the 1830s, a regular stage service operated between Wilmington and Lancaster, Pennsylvania. A connection was built southeast of Hockessin between Old Wilmington Road and Newport-Gap Pike, so the coaches had a fairly direct but hilly route from Wilmington to Gap, 15 miles east of Lancaster. Leaving Wilmington about 6 A.M., the coach would arrive at White Chimneys, an inn just west of Gap in time for a late mid-day dinner before moving on for the last leg to Lancaster.

Back in Auburn, the Garretts were needing an easier way to transport their snuff, and in 1863 most of what is now Yorklyn Road was built from the snuff mills to a junction with Old Wilmington Road near a kaolin quarry (later Golding’s). We assume that Valley Road had been extended southwest to the Limestone Road by this time, and Meetinghouse Road connected Old Wilmington Road with Marshall’s Bridge, just over 2 miles away. All this time there must have been a creek road following the present Route 82 from Auburn to Kennett Square.

As early as 1849, a semblance of Snuff Mill Road existed eastward toward Centreville. The route near Auburn was somewhat different as the descent into the Red Clay Valley was north of its present location. On the other side of town, several families from Ireland who worked in the snuff mills established a settlement of about six houses called Kileen, just west of Old Public Road. Our active volunteer Anne Cleary lives in what used to be Kileen.

When the Wilmington & Western Rail Road came in 1872, travel patterns changed forever and Auburn became Yorklyn. The center of Hockessin moved from the Meetinghouse corner to a site along the new railroad where Newport-Gap Pike

was crossed. A passenger and freight station was built here, followed by a lumber and coal yard, a few “hotels,” and many modest homes. Yorklyn Road was extended from its junction with Old Wilmington Road into the new town center. Hockessin became a hub for the highly-profitable kaolin clay industry. Telegraph lines paralleled the railroad, and the Garrett Snuff Mills had a telephone by the 1880s. News traveled at an amazing pace! Old Public Road from the paper mill, built by the Marshall brothers in 1890 on the site of John Garrett’s original grist mill, was in use until the southwest portion was closed soon after 1900. By that time, a connecting road heading west through Kileen had been built, and is now known as Benge Road. The north end of Meetinghouse Road, part of which formed the western boundary of the Auburn Heights Preserve, was closed about 1930.

Route 82 was known as “Creek Road,” at least from Kennett Square to Mount Cuba. We think an Indian trail along this route was used by the original John Garrett about 1726 to arrive at what was soon to become Auburn Mill. From Mount Cuba to the Kennett Turnpike the future Route 82 went over the hills, past Hillside Mill and a small lake formed by the dam for the mill. Before reaching the sluice for the mill’s water wheel, the water from the dam flowed over the road, no problem most of the year, but treacherous when frozen. Coleman duPont owned this mill and modified the building as a summer residence. When the Hoopes Reservoir was built in 1931-’32, the area around the mill was soon under 20 feet or more of water. Route 82 was re-routed to the north and made a right-angle turn at Walnut Green School, an active one-room public school until 1948.

Work Report: On Tuesday, December 6, a total of 12 volunteers attended the A.V.R.R. meeting plus the work session. At the meeting were Steve Bryce, Susan Randolph, Anne K. H. Cleary, Brent McDougall, Dave Leon, Mike Ciosek, Mark Bodensstab, Bob Koury, and Tom Sandbrook. The recent season was reviewed, and plans were made for projects during the winter and spring. At the Work Session, three more volunteers were on hand, Ted Kamen, Bob Jordan, and Jerry Lucas. Joining these for work after the R.R. meeting were Steve Bryce (in charge), Mark Bodensstab, and Dave Leon.

Packard work continued, refining the electrical system on the ’37 Model 1508. The H-5 burner was thoroughly cleaned, with the vaporizer being cleaned with a cable attached to an electric drill. Mineral wool and paste were applied to the valleys in the grate. On the Model 87, the boiler fittings leading to two of the blow-down valves were tightened.

On Wednesday, December 7, 3 volunteers showed up: Bill Schwoebel (in charge), Tom Marshall, and Steve Bryce. On the Model 87, two shims were installed alongside one of the spring shackles on the left front spring, in order to better align the spring itself. The steering gear box on the Mountain Wagon was examined, and information was obtained for adjusting the mesh of the worm gears. This had been adjusted many years ago to correct excessive wear, which is required again at this time. The Stanley boilers on hand were carefully measured before placing an order for a steel-tube welded boiler as a spare for our condensing cars.

On Thursday, December 8, nine volunteers were on hand for the work session and the “Shop Course,” this time on pipe, tubing, and flare fittings. They included Mark Russell (in charge), Richard Bernard, Devon Hall, Neal Sobocinski, Bob Jordan, Ted Kamen, Steve Bryce, Tom Marshall, and Bob Stransky. In the course, various types of threads were discussed, straight threads vs. tapered pipe threads, and the like. Copper tubing, flared fittings (both 37-degree and 45-degree) were covered briefly. A similar session will be held on Tuesday, December 13, at 7:00 P.M. in the shop.

The new boiler in the Model 87 was hydrostatically tested again, but a couple of small leaks still persist. The ’37 Packard work continued. The linoleum on the left running board of the 87 was improved by moving a joint under the tool box where it won’t show, and the running boards on this car and the Mountain Wagon were measured for linoleum replacement this winter.

The holiday dessert party for volunteers, presented by Rose Ann Hoover, will take place in the museum at 8 P.M. on Tuesday, December 13. This features CHOCOLATE, in all shapes and forms. The last Work Session before the holidays will be on Thursday, December 15. We will resume again on Tuesday, January 3, 2017. Thank you, one and all!