

The Modern History of Yorklyn (repeat of Nov. 9, 2009): Local history was made in November 2009 with the announcement and then the front-page newspaper article on the disposition of the former NVF property in Yorklyn. When a long-prosperous mill town dies, what happens to the contaminated mill sites, the buildings falling down, and the desirable land gobbled up by over-zealous developers? As of 2009, we had our answers. Through an ambitious plan developed by concerned land owners, a responsible developer, and the Delaware Division of Parks and Recreation, the best possible solution seems to have been achieved. The Bankruptcy Court settling the NVF case awarded the mills and about 85 acres of surrounding hillsides to CCS Developers and the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC), the parent of the Division of Parks. It looks like a wonderful solution to what could have been a serious problem for the environment and the future of the community.

Most of the NVF mills have been razed and their sites cleaned up, with several significant buildings being saved. Only three additional building lots have been carved out of the 85 hillside acres surrounding the mills; on the remainder, the State of Delaware will buy conservation easements. These easements will permit the Division of Parks to build up to six miles of trails connecting the Auburn Heights Preserve with Oversee Farm, both owned by the state, suitable for steam cars, bicycles, joggers, hikers and horseback riders. Three of the buildings in the main fiber mill complex between Yorklyn Road and the Wilmington & Western Railroad will be saved. The buildings in the Auburn Mills Historic District adjoining Auburn Heights will be saved and upgraded. These include the Marshall Brothers paper mill, the mill office (1895), and five dwelling units in two historic houses, the oldest of which was built in 1760.

The first of several generations of Garretts arrived in what is now Yorklyn in 1726 and built a grist mill in 1730, where the paper mill now stands next to Auburn Heights. In 1782, this was converted to a snuff mill, and during the 19th century, the mill site had various uses before the Marshall Brothers bought the property in 1889, and it became a paper mill, eventually funneling its entire output to the National Vulcanized Fibre Company downstream, a practice that continued until production was permanently halted in 2008. About 1800, the Garretts relocated their snuff business to a location where they developed many brick buildings on the east side of Red Clay Creek, downstream from their original mill, and here snuff was made until 1954. These buildings have fallen into disrepair, and many have collapsed. The first fiber mill at the location of the main NVF complex was built along the railroad in 1904, and most of the large buildings were constructed in 1911-12. Israel Marshall patented the idea for the largest endless fiber machine in the world, but he died before it was completed and installed. The uses for vulcanized fiber were diverse: originally it was popular for suitcases and satchels, trunks, and waste baskets. During World War II, it was used widely in the aircraft industry. In more recent years, its main use was for all types of insulating products. The rapid growth of the plastics industry sealed the fate of vulcanized fiber, and today the only manufacturers are in China.

Work Report: On Tuesday, June 14, three members of the railroad crew were at work and 20 more volunteers took advantage of the Ice Cream Run to Woodside Farm, our first of the year. Steve Bryce was in charge of the session, with Brent McDougall, Mike Ciosek, and Neal Sobocinski replacing ties on the back curve of the AVRR near the back building. Additional volunteers on the “run” were Anne and Ryan Cleary, Bob and Marilyn Stransky, Mark and Lynette Russell, Kelly and Stephanie Williams, Jared Schoenly, Dave Leon, Richard Bernard, Jeff Kennard, Larry Tennity, Tim Ward, Ted Kamen, Bob Wilhelm, John Bacino, Paul Kratunis, and Dan Citron. Our Stanley cars Model 76, 735, and 740, plus Bob Wilhelm’s 735 were used. The Model 725 fired poorly in getting ready, so it was left behind. There is a fuel restriction somewhere.

On Wednesday, June 15, five volunteers were on hand as follows: Jerry Novak (in charge), Richard Bernard, Larry Tennity, Jeff Kennard, and Mike Ciosek.

Two 27-drawer steel cabinets, donated to us by Richard Bernard, were moved to Auburn Heights and are temporarily stored in the back building. Twelve more new ties were installed on the back curve of the AVRR. The Mountain Wagon, after its successful trip to Hershey last Sunday, was pushed out of the garage to put up the top, but a sprinkle of rain delayed this project. The battery chargers were hooked to the Rauch & Lang electric.

On Thursday, June 16, eight volunteers attended, as follows: Dave Leon (in charge), Jerry Lucas, Devon Hall, Bob Jordan, Ted Kamen, Jim Personti, Geoff Fallows, and Bill Schwoebel.

The wiring to the headlights and most of the dash lights on the '37 Packard was completed. The Mountain Wagon was pushed out, the top put up, and then it was pushed back to its final lodging in the newly painted side of the garage. The water filter on the Model H-5 was cleaned. Locomotive 402 is getting closer to completion with the installation of its rebuilt side rods. A driving lesson in the Model 740 was given to Devon Hall by teacher Jerry Lucas.