

February 27, 2006

Hello, Steam Team:

Here is the "train story" for our 7-week rotation:

About 1901, my father was enrolled in Wilmington Friends School, then at 4th & West Streets, 7 short blocks from the old Wilmington & Western (B & O's Landenberg Branch) station at Front and Market. He and his sister Anna and two Mitchell cousins rode the train each day to and from school. The Mitchells got on at Mill Creek (where Valley Road crossed the railroad west of Hockessin), and the Marshalls at Yorklyn. The morning train left Landenberg at 7:00, Yorklyn at 7:20, and arrived in Wilmington at 7:55. They returned on an afternoon train.

A lot of stories have come down from their experiences on the train. My father and Henry C. Mitchell, his first cousin a few months older than he, loved to reminisce in their later years (Henry was the grandfather of the ice cream man, Jim Mitchell). Here are some of them. There was a "wild man" named Crossan who was one of the engineers on the line. He was known for doing some crazy things in order to make up time. One morning the train sped out of Yorklyn at a "terrible clip", and when it went through the rock cut above Mount Cuba, the cars swayed so badly they scraped the rocks on the side. Al Hughes, the senior conductor on the line, pulled the emergency cord, got the train stopped, and went up to the engine and "laid out" Crossan in no uncertain terms. The remainder of the trip was at a more leisurely pace. Coming home one day, Crossan was running the afternoon train. Pulling away too fast from one of the station stops, the pressure inside the cylinder stripped the threads and blew out one of the cylinder cocks. When the train stopped at Yorklyn, Crossan decided to fix it. He went over to Ed Dennison's woodpile (Dennison's store was next to the station) and whittled a round peg and drove it up into the open hole at one end of the cylinder. His repair was short-lived. As he pulled away from Yorklyn on the upgrade toward Hockessin, the plug blew out, and from there to Landenberg a lot of power was lost as escaping steam caused a searing hiss with each stroke of the cylinder.

Another time, Crossan with the morning train was rolling along down the straight-away between Mount Cuba and Wooddale Quarry, and he didn't see John O'Neal's horse and buggy approaching the grade crossing at Barley Mill Road. O'Neal got across the track and was hit straight on by the locomotive's pilot (cow-catcher). His buggy was shattered into pieces and the old man was thrown out. Fortunately, he was not seriously hurt. Coming home in the afternoon one day, the "boys", probably encouraged by my father, hitched a ride in the locomotive's cab. They were having a grand time, but the agent at Ashland spotted them in the cab, and reported it to the authorities. That was the end of their cab rides.

Every four years (and to a lesser extent, every two) election day was a time to celebrate, regardless of who won. The afternoon train would carry many celebrants to Wilmington where they would get drunk and await the election returns. The train crew working the late night train back to the country usually had a discipline problem. One such night after the westbound train crossed the "S" trestle, the conductor called out "YORKLYN!". One poor fellow ran out onto the vestibule and jumped off. Unfortunately, the train was still 1/4 mile short of Yorklyn station, and he landed in a stagnant pool alongside the track (that pool is still there). Another time, brakeman Charlie Ryan, a son-in-law of conductor Al Hughes, tried to put a drunk off the train at one of the station stops. The drunk protested and kicked Charlie in the leg. His leg became infected and it was amputated. About 1913, my father sold him a Stanley steamer and had it equipped with hand controls.

From our Annual Meeting on February 16, hindsight tells us several things should be reported to you that were overlooked. Certain benefits go with various categories of membership. A standard \$30 membership gives you two complimentary tickets, a \$100 membership gives you four such tickets, a \$250 membership gives you six complimentary tickets plus an invitation to a special event, and a \$500 membership gives you eight complimentary tickets plus an invitation to the same special event. All members who have E-mail receive the "Weekly News", and all get the quarterly "Auburn Heights Herald" by regular mail. All members receive a 10% discount on items sold in our gift shop, and the opportunity to volunteer for our various activities, as well as discounts on special things like the bus trip to the B & O Museum in Baltimore on April 1st. New members joining after October 1 each year will be credited for membership carrying through the following year.

If you were a member of FAHP in 2005, please renew your membership for 2006 as soon as possible. Rose Ann Hoover reports that all but about 20 of our 80 plus members have renewed so far. There will be a grace period until April when the next issue of the "Herald" is published, but if we have not heard from you by that time, the April issue will be your last. We hope you will continue, as we expect a much broader and more organized restoration and maintenance program, as well as developments along educational lines with the arrival of our new Executive Director and the establishment of our FAHP office above the garage. Don't miss out on the fun!

Rob Robison reports that he still has seats to fill on the bus going to the B & O Museum on Saturday, April 1. This is our first special trip for members, and should provide an interesting and rewarding day. The bus will leave the parking lot at Auburn Heights at 9 A.M., returning by 4 P.M. Cost is \$22.50 for members, and \$32.50 for non-members, with a \$4 discount in each category for children 12 years of age and under.

At the annual Board meeting last week, the following officers were elected for the coming year: Tom Marshall, president; Rob Robison, vice president; and Tom "Butch" Cannard, secretary. Emil Christofano was appointed by the Board as acting treasurer, until a candidate can be found to take Joe Mosteller's place as treasurer. We want to thank Joe for his years of service in keeping our financial records and for filling the treasurer's shoes during the past year. We also want to thank Anne Cleary for her excellent minutes as secretary, and to Emil for serving as our first vice president (like John Adams). At the conclusion of the meeting, a new \$7,000 gift was announced, and the next day a \$25,000 contribution was received, which puts us in a solid financial condition to begin 2006.

All the old wire was removed from the Model 735's boiler by Jerry Lucas and his crew last Thursday, and Bob Wilhelm is coming Wednesday with his special equipment to test the shell thickness on this boiler. If all is well, I've found enough new wire on hand to re-wrap this shell. Anne Cleary is chairing an Events and Scheduling Committee meeting tomorrow night, 2/28, at her home (7:30 P.M.). New safety valves were delivered today for the locomotive boilers, and they can be installed. The rear axle from the Model EX is supposed to be enroute from the gear shop in Michigan to Bob Barrett's shop near Buffalo for final design and fitting of hydraulic brakes, and in a couple of weeks we hope to have the parts here to install the same kind of brakes on the 735. A new liner must be fabricated for this car's burner, and I think the material is on hand to perform this work. Bill Schwoebel, Bob Reilly and I are planning a strategy session on Wednesday, 3/1, to organize future projects and work sessions. Bob is making progress in selecting what he will need to start a working office. John McNamara is planning to meet with Bob, Ruth and I to discuss education-related possibilities for FAHP this year.

Our "boys", Bill Rule, Bill Schwoebel, Butch Cannard, Jerry Novak, and Emil Christofano plan to leave here on March 6 for their trip to northeast Florida to fetch and prepare our Models K and 71 for the Concours d'Elegance at Amelia Island, March 10-12. A lot is going on. Best wishes to all. Tom