

July 23, 2007

Hello, Steam Team:

The Road Art Lives On (Art Sybell, that is): Now the northern mile of Old Kennett Road, running between Clifton Mills and Five Points, 2 plus miles from Auburn Heights, has quite a history. The legendary Sandy Flash, the villain of Bayard Taylor's "Story of Kennett", probably used this road for his surprise visits to the fictional Gilbert Potter's house at Clifton Mills (the "Story" took place in 1796, but "Sandy" was hanged at Chester in 1778, so the author Taylor took considerable license in his local tale written in 1866).

At age 14 Israel Marshall, then living with his parents at Marshall's Bridge, was enrolled in the Eaton Academy on West State Street in Kennett Square. Built in 1843, the old Academy building is the oldest section of the present Friends Home of Kennett. Israel's aunt (Thomas S. Marshall's sister) had married Thomas Hannum and their son "Marsh" Hannum was the same age as his cousin Israel, so they were great buddies. The Hannum's home was the handsome stone house, probably built about 1800 and recently restored, close to the road in question near Five Points. So when "Marsh" was also sent to Eaton Academy, it was arranged for Israel to room and board with the Hannums, returning home on weekends. This halved the daily commute to school each day. (As a sidelight, Marshall Hannum's youngest son Wilmer served many years on the Board of the Friends Home, as did Israel's son and daughter, Clarence Marshall and Anna Mancill. I, too, served for 36 years, so the four of us had over 100 years on the Friends Home Board. Marsh's oldest son, Paul Hannum, built the Marshall Museum building for his second cousin in 1947.) On a winter night early in 1866 the old grist and saw mill at Marshall's Bridge, almost completely converted to a paper mill by Thomas S. Marshall, burned to the ground, the two teen-age boys saw the flames, and ran on foot the nearly-two miles to the scene of excitement. Thomas soon rebuilt the mill to a state-of-the-art paper mill in the months that followed.

It was a long time before the "hill" road from Clifton Mills to Five Points was paved. I remember riding with my mother one day she got lost (which happened occasionally when she ventured off the normally-traveled roads). We were starting down the road from Five Points but it was very dusty and rough. She proceeded very slowly in her new '29 Packard Standard Eight sedan, and eventually descended the very steep and scary hill to the mill along the creek. We never used that route to Kennett Square, nor did anyone else, as the Creek Road (Route 82), winding and ½ mile longer than it was, provided the only practical route.

In 1937, the "hill road" was greatly improved by grading near Clifton Mills and finally paving. Although the Short Line Bus never changed its route, everyone else from the Yorklyn area began using the new and shorter route. A large cut in the hillside above the creek provided a much more gradual grade as ascent was made from Clifton Mills. Before World War II, I drove my '40 Packard 110 at TOP speed over this road in both directions. Never again would Route 82, the old Creek Road, be the favored route, even though this "water level route" was greatly improved about 15 years ago. In the early 1960's (I think) the hill road was improved again, with additional grading and widening as well as smoother paving. While we don't recommend the steep grades of the hill road with the steamers, be sure to use it the next time you go from Yorklyn to Kennett Square by conventional means. You will have the added advantage of passing Art and Joyce Sybell's estate.

Although I was not active last week, both Tuesday and Thursday evenings had productive work sessions. Thanks to all who helped with the H-5 engine(s), the 740, the 735, the K, and the 607, as well as track work, cleaning up the new shingle pile, cleaning the locomotives, and moving exhibits in the museum for floor painting. Today, Bill Rule and Emil Christofano fetched Norman Schaut's 1910 Model 61 Stanley from Egg Harbor, NJ, to be worked on here with the hope of making it operable in the next few weeks. Bill will be heading up this work, but there is also a lot of cleaning that can be done, as salt air and fire extinguisher spray have not been kind to the metal parts. Schaut will pay FAHP for this work, probably by making a suggested donation.

Tomorrow night is to be an Ice Cream Run, and about 5 cars are "eligible" to go. Several others are boxed in because of the newly-painted museum floor. The following are ready to be used: Mountain Wagon, Model 76, Model K, Model 607, and the Rauch & Lang. If absolutely needed, the 71 and the 87 can also be worked out of the museum. Starting at 5 P.M., the 735 is going to be used by Butch Cannard and Steve Bryce to teach an outsider, Scott Wetter of Illinois, how to run a 735, as Mr. Wetter has just bought one and knows very little about it. It may be that the latter part of this "lesson" may be a trip in the car for ice cream before it gets too dark. Butch and Kelly Williams had this car fired up last Thursday and believe it is working well. We won't charge our visitor, but hope he will make a meaningful contribution to FAHP. For drivers going to Woodside Farm, firing up should begin by 5:30, with departure not later than 6:30-6:45. The return trip should start not later than 8:00 P.M. Riders should be at Auburn Heights by 6:30 P.M. Seats will be available.

The new Working Group Chart is being finalized, and suggested Work Projects for the next several weeks will also be provided. The "Auburn Heights Herald", edited by Rob Robison, is expected to be put together this week, with publishing date next week. On Thursday, July 26, the Events Committee will meet, probably in the Museum, to discuss several prospective events, on and off site. Bob Reilly is expected back in Yorklyn tonight, and our new president, Mike May, will be here August 7-10. During this period, several Board Committee meetings, plus the quarterly Board meeting, are planned. Best wishes to all! Tom