

Delaware Blizzards of the Past: As we dig out from the “Blizzard of 2016,” brought to mind are the heavy snows I recall when I was young. Our members who live in “Snow States” will wonder why this even makes a story, but the 20” or more that fell upon us in a 30-hour period is a lot for northern Delaware. A storm of this magnitude is so different today, however. It was forecast accurately three or four days ahead, the heavy equipment required to handle the situation was ready to go, and a lot of plowing was done long before the snowfall ended. We were lucky in that it stayed cold enough to keep the snow fairly light, and power failures have been less than feared.

When I was young, country people understood that they would be “snowed in” a few times each winter. Motorized equipment to plow and keep roads open was almost non-existent. It seems we had more snow then, but I can remember only a few major storms.

On my 10th birthday in 1934, Clifford Murray arrived early at the old Wilmington Friends School at 4th & West Streets to take my cousin Eleanor and I home to Yorklyn. Also staying with us that winter was a maternal cousin, Mary Comly “Comie” Shallcross, age 19, who was attending Beacom College at 10th and Jefferson. Making our way through the unplowed streets, we picked up Comie and started for home out Pennsylvania Avenue and Kennett Pike. Moving along at 15-20 m.p.h. with blinding snow sticking to the windshield, there was no way we could make the usual turn onto Route 82 north of Greenville -- snow had blown across and completely closed the road. Cliffey, using his usual good judgment, continued north on Kennett Pike all the way to Hamorton at the “head of the Pike,” as old-timers called it. We proceeded to Kennett Square and somehow made it down Creek Road (Route 82) to Auburn Heights. It was not possible to get in the driveway with the '28 Packard Six, so Comie and I ran through the deep snow to the front porch. I don't recall how Eleanor got home. The next day, we tried to use Route 82 to get to Kennett Pike. All was well until we reached the vicinity of Walnut Green School, where the deep cuts on both sides of the school were filled with six or eight feet of snow. We were detoured through a farm gate onto a field and thereby by-passed the blocked areas. Just before we reached Kennett Pike, we had to do this again.

On March 10, 1938, Aunt Bertha Marshall, who had fear of absolutely nothing, picked up my mother, and they started for a rummage sale somewhere on Limestone Road. The name “flea market” was used only in Paris; in this country it might be a rummage sale or an estate sale, of which there were many during the Depression years. As snow was coming down rapidly, they proceeded out Valley Road and turned left on Limestone next to today's Lantana Square. It was slippery and going up the first grade the car upset. Aunt Bertha was able to crawl out, but my mother was trapped. Sam Peirson, who later operated a liquor store in Hockessin, came to the rescue and eased her out. She had broken a pelvic bone that put her out of commission for several weeks.

Hurricane Hazel left devastation through our area on October 15, 1954. The next day the first AACA meet at Hershey took place. Barely three weeks later on November 5, a surprise early snowstorm blanketed our area. No one knew it was coming. I made it home from the travel office in my '52 DeSoto, but Elwood Wilkins III was not so lucky. He was working at the DuPont Company paint-testing facility on Naaman's Road, and he lived with his parents in Strickersville. His daily transportation was his 1947(?) MG TC. He made it as far as Auburn Heights but gave up between our gate posts. Elwood spent the night with us, and he should have been more aggressive in getting away the next morning. About 3 P.M., he decided to leave for Strickersville. Climbing the grade from Whiteman's Grove (not Whiteman's Garage) to Milford Cross Roads, cars were stranded all over the road, and he couldn't get through. He spent a second night with some friends nearby, thereby taking parts of three days to get home.

On Thursday, March 20, 1958, heavy snow blanketed our area, and no cars, trucks, or buses got in or out of Yorklyn that day. Thirty inches of wet snow was measured on the scale at the coal yard in Avondale. The next morning I had to get to the travel office, as we had 22 people booked on the “Queen of Bermuda” from New York the next day, and many of the prospective passengers were stranded in their homes. I went to Hockessin

and Lancaster Pike, and I never saw such devastation -- all the electric lines were laying on the ground. In Wilmington the streets had not been plowed, but there was no traffic. I parked in the middle of West Street, completely blocking it, but nobody cared. Fortunately, the phone line worked from the travel office to New York, and I reached the Furness-Bermuda Line. I couldn't tell them how many might make it to New York the next day (as it turned out, about 19 of the 22 made the ship). In those days, a much kinder time, the steamship line would refund tickets in full if they had advance cancelation. Many in the Yorklyn-Hockessin area were without power for six days. My mother offered warm beds at Auburn Heights to several couples, and reluctantly Mr. and Mrs. Grover Gregg as well as John and Lillian Mitchell accepted before their power was restored. We had steam heat and electricity through the mill.

On an early March day in 1962, I took the train from Wilmington to New York, as I was refining plans for the second AACA trip to Europe, scheduled to take place that October. It snowed in New York through the afternoon, and in early evening I boarded a train at Penn Station for home. The train made good time, and my '55 Chrysler Windsor, parked for the day in an open lot near the Wilmington station, started without a problem. I put on the tire chains, cleared off the snow, and started for home out Lancaster Pike. The pike was clear in some areas, which was hard on the chains, so I decided to take Old Wilmington Road. Just beyond the junction of Loveville Road, I could see the snow had drifted across the road, but I decided I could make it through at some speed. Less than half way into the drift, however, I was STUCK. I walked back to Norman Gregg's house, got him out of bed, and borrowed a shovel. Useless! I had ample gasoline in the tank, so I set up the idle so the generator would continue to charge, opened a window slightly, turned on the heater, and went to sleep on the back seat. About 7 A.M., a plow came through and all was well. My mother was worried as to my whereabouts (no cell phones). That storm caused devastation on the Delaware coast. The boardwalk was washed away at Rehoboth and a few ocean-front homes were toppled into the sea. As I write this, Ruth is out shoveling. I am glad to stay inside.

Work Report: On Tuesday, January 19, fifteen volunteers were at the session, as follows: Jerry Novak (in charge), Tim Ward, Jerry Lucas, Ted Kamen, Bob Jordan, Tom Marshall, Steve Bryce, Bob Stransky, Anne Cleary, Tom Sandbrook, Dennis Dragon, Mark Russell, Brent McDougall, Bill Schwoebel, and John Bacino.

A new floor mat was made for the front of the Model 735. The defective union connecting the superheater to the steam pipe was removed with some difficulty. On the Model H-5, the special shims fabricated for the wrist pins are not thick enough, so another try will be made. Additional tears in the engine case were soldered. One of the coaches from the A.V.R.R. was brought to the railroad shop (basement of the regular shop) for maintenance. A proposal for a plastic liner for the water tank on Locomotive 401 was explained and favorably considered. The railroad committee approved moving ahead with this idea. On the Model 607, it appears impossible to remove the tank from the car for repair unless the body is lifted slightly. Further thought will be given to this project. The new-wiring project on the '37 Packard is moving along. The gauges were removed from the dash and wiring underneath moved ahead. The lens was removed from one of the headlights to allow access to the wiring.

On Thursday, January 21, thirteen volunteers were present: Tim Ward (in charge), Jim Personti, Geoff Fallows, Bob Jordan, Ted Kamen, Kelly Williams, Brent McDougall, Tom Sandbrook, John Bacino, Devon Hall, Jerry Lucas, Steve Bryce, and Tom Marshall.

The water tank was successfully removed from the Model 607 by lifting the body very slightly in the rear. On the tender tank from Locomotive 401, all the old baffles were cut out and the inside of the tank scraped and cleaned for the eventual installation of a plastic liner. Careful measurements were taken. John Bacino has agreed to chair this project, with help from other railroad volunteers.