

FAHP News, April 20, 2015

Managers of NVF in the 1930s: As the National Vulcanized Fibre Company mills at Yorklyn are gradually razed, it reminds me of more prosperous days when the company was flourishing. My first direct recollection comes from the 1930s when I was growing up. I was really familiar with only the Yorklyn operations, the largest in the company that also owned mills in Wilmington, Newark and Kennett Square, as well as several in more distant places. In the late 1920s, President J. Warren Marshall (my uncle) had moved the home office from Yorklyn to Beech Street in Wilmington, next to the Cardavert fibre mill NVF had bought. Along with Marshall, most of the corporate officers, such as John K. Johnston of Newark, sales manager for the company, T. Clarkson Taylor, a vice president, and John P. Eckles, purchasing agent, had their offices on Beech Street.

I was more familiar with the managers at Yorklyn. Three of the houses (increased to four in 1936) on Gun Club Hill, all owned by the company, were occupied by managers. J. Burtwell White, who managed one of the several mills in the complex, was in the first house going toward the gun club, this house having been moved by mule team and block-and-fall up the hill from alongside the railroad in 1922. Mrs. White, especially, was annoyed by the noise from the gun club when the annual tournament was held, so my father would advise them when the shoot was scheduled, and they would plan their vacation to be away that week. The next house was a Sears Roebuck pre-fab, occupied for at least 15 years by Manley P. Northam and his wife. He was the Efficiency Expert for the company (a position my father thought unnecessary). House number 3, a 2½ story stucco-over-frame dwelling, was home to another mill manager, Frank Cronin, and house #4 became the home of William D. Marsey, who seemed to be an overall liaison manager for the Yorklyn mills.

Samuel S. Dennison, paymaster at Yorklyn, built his private home on Yorklyn Road. George Guyer, also a manager of one of the mills in the Yorklyn complex, built a home in Killeen on what is now Benges Road. The Benges, John and Leroy (father and son), were for most of their careers superintendents in turn of the Marshall Brothers Paper Mill on the road that was later named for them. A historic house across Red Clay Creek from the mill was occupied by John, Fanny, and their family until John's death in 1936. During World War II, Roy and Emma moved in and lived there until the company sold the house in 1957. Leroy Benges Jr. and his wife, Margie, bought it from NVF and occupied it until their deaths, after which it was purchased and restored by FAHP director Stan Wilcox.

There were other managers of smaller departments, such as Bob Kelton of Hockessin, National's "man" in Delaware's General Assembly, D. W. "Bill" Williams, and Dick Keating, head of the Shipping Department. Charlie Taylor was in charge of much of the plant maintenance, and J. Paul Galloway was a plant electrician, later forming his own business. Others in responsible positions were too numerous to mention. With two or three exceptions, those mentioned were retired by the late 1940s.

Warren Marshall was concerned about a successor. In the late 1930s, his son-in-law, S. John Pyle, joined the company and had increasingly responsible positions during his 10-year connection with NVF. John Macadam was then elevated with the hope that he might move up to the top position, but he was soon assigned as sales manager for the western U.S. and moved to California. Finally in

1952, Eugene R. Perry, a former Westinghouse executive from Pittsburgh, became executive vice president, and less than a year later, upon Warren Marshall's death, he was elected president, a position he held into the Victor Posner era, which began in the mid-1960s.

Work Report: On Tuesday, April 14, in addition to the Events Committee meeting, the work session and the Stanley drivers' course had the following 20 attendees: Ted Kamen (in charge), Bob Jordan, Edwin Paschall, Dennis Dragon, Rich Gregg, Jerry Novak, Jerry Lucas, Bill Schwoebel, John Bacino, Mike Ciosek, Tim Ward, Dave Leon, Kelly Williams, Tom Marshall, Bob Stransky, Richard Bernard, Devon Hall, Steve Bryce, Lou Mandich, and Paul Kratunis.

The water tank for the Cretors popper was cleaned further in preparation for paint. Kelly Williams brought some specially mixed yellow paint to match the wheels of the new cart. The assembly of A.V.R.R. track sections continued in the shop. Many of those mentioned above attended the Stanley operators' class in the museum.

On Thursday, April 16, the following 10 volunteers were on hand: Mark Russell (in charge), Steve Bryce, Emil Christofano, Geoff Fallows, Paul Kratunis, Dave Leon, Tom Marshall, James Personti, Bob Stransky, and Tim Ward.

An inventory was taken of our small screws and nuts, with the thought of placing an order with Kenneth Lilly and Company to include enough track bolts to complete the new sections now being assembled. One of the front wheels from the 725 was removed, and the spokes were "Quik-Polyed" to fill the joints that have opened up with years of use. The condition that kept the Model 76 from syphoning turned out to be a cracked nipple between the boiler check and the down-pipe. The bonnet will probably have to be removed to repair this leak.

The stripping of the Cretors water tank was completed. Locomotive 401 was examined by James Personti and Tom, and the former thinks he found what is causing such an uneven cut-off. This will be addressed very soon. It was discovered that the front truck on this locomotive is out of place, which can be easily corrected. Most of the new parts for rebuilding the H-5 engine are on hand, and the new crankshaft being fabricated by James will complete what is needed to re-assemble the engine.

The Mountain Wagon was used for a firing-up demonstration for a group of surgeons who visited on Friday. All enjoyed a short ride around the driveway, proving that the 100-year-old car will still run well. A spring schedule has been worked out to train more candidates, both beginners and intermediates, in the operation of the Stanley cars in our collection. Including teachers, we have about 12 volunteers in the current program.

Contractor Andy Walton began work on the new concrete retaining wall on April 13 as promised, and except for some final spreading of crushed stone and back-filling, the job is completed. We are pleased with a job well done.