

MARCH 22, 2010 F.A.H.P. NEWS

The Wilmington & Western R.R. This past Saturday, several of us attended the 50th Anniversary dinner of Historic Red Clay Valley, Inc., the “parent” of the present Wilmington & Western R.R. The program brought back many memories.

Using Route 82 daily from Yorklyn to my travel office in Wilmington in the 1950's, as I paralleled the railroad several places I thought of the stories my father told when he rode the train to school just after 1900. I had never witnessed real passenger service on the Landenberg Branch of the B & O, and I fantasized how great it would be if that could happen again. In 1958, I decided to do something about it. George Sargisson was the Executive Director of Recreation Promotion and Service, Inc., an organization started by W. W. “Chick” Laird in 1945 to assist people with recreational ideas in fulfilling their goals. I knew George, I asked him about it, and he said immediately that we should talk to Clayton M. Hoff, who had retired from the DuPont Company in 1945 to establish the Brandywine Valley Association. On a nice fall afternoon in 1958, Sargisson, Hoff, and I walked much of the line and they were impressed with its beauty. At the conclusion of our walk Clayton Hoff insisted we should visit Roy Magargal at the Greenbank Mill, and he told me that this operation, too, should be preserved.

The next winter, George Sargisson and I visited the main office of the B & O Railroad in a wonderful, ornate office building at #2 North Charles Street in Baltimore. Our purpose was to generate interest among B & O officials to lease the Landenberg Branch, or a portion of it, on weekends when no freight service existed, to a non-profit volunteer organization to be established for the operation of steam passenger trains. We were wine and dined, but nothing came of the effort. In July, 1959, a prominent group of local business men was assembled at the Yorklyn Gun Club, and C. L. Kroll of the B & O in Baltimore attended. I laid out the plan, the News Journal gave us a nice story, but again the idea died. The B & O had no serious interest; there was no precedent for such a thing and the rail unions were too strong. Despite the discouraging news, Historic Red Clay Valley, Inc. was incorporated in 1960, soon had a membership approaching 100, and engaged in other historic activities while biding its time.

William Schmidt from B & O's main office came to the valley in 1963, I drove him around in my father's 1913 Stanley Model 76, and he said he would do what he could to get our ideas in motion. Still again, nothing happened. Early in 1964, Alto Smith, Pete Steele, Leroy Scheuerman, George Sargisson and I visited Governor Elbert N. Carvel, then nearing the end of his second term, in his Dover office. We made a presentation, and the Governor liked it. He told us his old roommate in college, Doug Turnbull, was a vice president of the B & O, and within a few hours they talked on the phone about our project. We met with Mr. Turnbull, and explained our objective. This time, the wheels began to turn, but it was far from a “done deal”.

Both Governor Carvel and the B & O gave me the names of the heads of the several railroad operating unions who had to approve the idea of volunteers running the trains. This was one of the toughest jobs I ever attempted, and it took time. I wrote countless letters (usually they were unanswered), visited the union leaders in their homes, and attended brotherhood meetings. In late summer of 1965, we had our agreement, weighted heavily in favor of the B & O.

This past Saturday, we released the big Diesel locomotive, owned by member Jim Sank, and borrowed a smaller and more handsome gasoline-powered “Diesel” in its place. Jim has been very generous with us, and has given us the option of buying this new acquisition if we like it. It is presently in our engine house with some track modification needed there for easy access. We are anxious to see how it works pulling Auburn Valley trains. The Stanley Model K was fired up with its new boiler, a few leaks have been repaired, and it’s ready for the bonnet and hood to be put on. Work continued on restoring the Model 607 and the Rauch & Lang electric. The main office computer, out of service for at least two weeks, was finally connected again on Thursday night and appears to work as it should. The Publicity Committee met on Tuesday, and the Web Site Committee on Thursday, both meetings in the evening.

In less than 6 weeks, we need to have most of our cars cleaned up and running for Old Dover Days (2 cars on May 1) and Point-to-Point at Winterthur (10 or more cars if possible on May 2). Drivers who are qualified should keep this in mind, check the work sheets on the bench in the garage, and work toward having everything ready. If “assignments” are required, operator-to-vehicle, check with Steve Bryce, Bill Schwoebel, or myself. Also, we plan to work in driving lessons for our newer volunteers during the next few weeks.

John and Grant Goold, father and son, from Camerton near Bath in England plan to be with us from Tuesday evening through Thursday this week. In their shop, they have built all parts required for most Stanley models, including complete engines. They want to measure and photograph our Model 78 with the hope of building a completely new and accurate one. We are happy to report that Cathy Schwoebel is recovering nicely from an emergency heart operation, where a stent was inserted early last week.

Next Saturday, March 27, is Red Clay Valley Clean-Up Day, planned each year by Jim Jordan and the Red Clay Valley Association. From 8 A.M. until noon, volunteers pick up debris and trash along the roads and meadows of the Red Clay Valley. We are asked to participate, as are many organizations in the valley. If you can join the volunteers at 8 A.M., you can go to one of three places: the Ashland Nature Center, Anson B. Nixon Park in Kennett Square, or the Kennett YMCA Outdoor Pool. Supplies, including gloves and a commemorative T-shirt, are provided. Last year over 700 volunteers collected 15 tons of trash. We have also volunteered the Preserve’s pick-up truck which Richard Bernard has offered to drive. Small trucks like this are asked to assemble at NVF’s main parking lot just west of the bridge in Yorklyn at 9:30. If you have questions, call the Delaware Nature Society, (302) 239-2334, or the Red Clay Valley Association, (610) 793-1090. Please help if you can!

The Removal of Delaware Route 82 from Creek Road: Last week, this was explained in the “News” and members were asked to oppose the removal of the Route 82 designation, as it will make finding Auburn Heights even more difficult than it now is. However, most of you who clicked on the web link to the applicable DelDot office found the link given to be in error. We ask you to try again, and the correct link is given herewith. The **deadline is April 4**, so please act immediately. Many thanks.

http://del.dot.gov/information/projects/misc_virtual_workshops/rt82/index.shtml

Tom