

South of the Canal: In 1845, the digging of the first Chesapeake and Delaware Canal through northern Delaware cut New Castle County almost in half. Although draw bridges crossed from the very beginning, the county's portion to the south developed a second culture and aligned itself more with Kent and Sussex Counties to the south. As were Kent and Sussex, this southern part of New Castle County was all coastal plain and maintained its agrarian character. Although there was a lot of farming north of the canal until the late 20th century, the northern half lent itself to early manufacturing, especially in the Piedmont areas north and west of Wilmington. In the south, farms were large, there were no cities, and this area had less than 20% of the county's people prior to the 21st century. Some claim the climate is different on opposite sides of the canal.

One of the coastal rivers in southern New Castle County was the Appoquinimink, which was navigable up to Cantwell's Bridge. Since this was an up-and-coming port for timber and getting farm produce to the markets of Wilmington and Philadelphia in the early 19th century, the name was changed to Odessa, copied from the busy Ukrainian port on the Black Sea. The prosperous merchants of Odessa, including Daniel Corbit and the Watkins family, built luxurious homes along Main Street, most of which are restored and form the nucleus for today's Historic Homes of Odessa. Like those who live in Old New Castle, residents of Odessa are very proud of their heritage. The Presbyterians had established an early church along Drawyers Creek, a tributary of the Appoquinimink, in 1711, and the Quakers had built a tiny meetinghouse in Odessa that was a station on the Underground Railroad. In 1859, however, the Delaware Railroad, which opened up the Delmarva Peninsula to the outside world, bypassed Odessa in favor of Middletown, less than four miles to the west, and subsequent growth was near this new north-south artery.

About 1908, an electric trolley line was built from the docks at Odessa four miles west to the railroad station at Middletown, but it was not successful and ceased operation within four years. Passing down the middle of Odessa's Main Street, as well as Middletown's by the same name, it should have been well patronized, but apparently the population was not there to support it, and a few people were starting to own automobiles. My guess is that Middletown had about 1,000 people and Odessa perhaps 300 in the early 20th century. Other towns in southern New Castle County were Port Penn, Townsend (pronounced Town's End), South St. Georges, and Blackbird. Some small "crossroad" communities included Augustine Beach, Bayview, Taylor's Bridge, Fleming's Landing, Fieldsboro, McDonough, Boyd's Corner, Armstrong, Mount Pleasant, and Summit Bridge.

This area was home to my mother's family of Shallcrosses. Sereck F. Shallcross (1816-1906), my great-grandfather, a Quaker from Byberry in northeast Philadelphia, bought a large farm northwest of Odessa that he named Oakland in 1842. By the time his son James T. Shallcross (1847-1911), my grandfather, was married in 1872, Sereck owned several farms, and the newlyweds were established on Belleview Farm, across Drawyers Creek to the north. Here at Belleview, my mother and her five siblings were born between 1876 and 1891. Her eldest sister, Mary, married Bassett Ferguson of Blackbird on the lawn at Belleview on June 6, 1906. In 1908 the family moved into a home in Middletown that they named "Flowerdale." For several years before their marriage, my father called on my mother at Flowerdale in one of his Stanley steamers.

Passenger car #852 on the miniature Auburn Valley Railroad, the "Mary E. Shallcross," is named for my maternal grandmother (1852-1944). She was the daughter of Wilson Vandegrift and his wife, whose first name I don't know, and she was born in a small house no longer standing southeast of Odessa. She grew up on a larger farm at the edge of the marsh along Delaware Bay near Bayview, and this house still stands. On December 18, 1872, she married James T. Shallcross in the new Drawyers Presbyterian Church in Odessa. This was the first wedding to be held there, but the church closed its doors early in the 20th century. It had replaced Old Drawyers, built in 1773, as a regular place of worship, as the historic church north of town had no heat (and people liked modern things, not historic properties). Interestingly, when my parents were married at Old Drawyers on June 4, 1921, this was the first wedding in the old church since it had closed as a place of weekly worship. Many weddings have been held there since 1921, including two of my mother's nieces. The Friends of Old Drawyers is a historical organization that owns the church and the active adjoining cemetery. In the 21st century, the

population of New Castle County south of the canal is growing “by leaps and bounds.” In 2013, Middletown’s population was estimated at 20,000.

Work Report: A busy week has been completed. In addition to our two regular work sessions, there were meetings of the Events Committee, the Railroad Committee, a surprise baby shower for Dan Citron, and a day of track work on Saturday.

It is believed the Events Committee meeting on Tuesday, March 10, was attended by Susan Randolph, Jesse Gagnon, Rose Ann Hoover, Anne Cleary, Brent McDougall, Dan Citron, Steve Bryce, Jerry Novak, and Richard Bernard, all of whom stuffed eggs for the big hunts on April 3 and 4. As the Events Committee meeting concluded, at least 30 volunteers attended a surprise baby shower for Dan Citron in the museum. Fun was had by all as Dan opened his many gifts and others enjoyed Susan’s cakes and cookies.

At the Tuesday work session, the following 13 took part: Dave Leon (in charge), Ted Kamen, Bob Jordan, Brent McDougall, Mark Russell, Kelly Williams, Edwin Paschall, Jay Williams, John Schuber, Ken Ricketts, Mac Taylor, Steve Bryce, and Tom Marshall. In addition, Dennis Dragon and Bill Rule were on hand in the afternoon.

Electrical wiring continued on the Lionel standard-gauge layout. The burner pan for the Model 750 was partially straightened. The accession tags were located, the one for the 750 is attached, and the one for the Model T Ford is in the car to be attached. Another section of A.V.R.R. track was assembled, and more cross ties were pre-drilled. A total of 120 lengths of new aluminum rail and some new castings for the rear truck of Locomotive 402 were picked up in Lancaster by Kelly Williams and delivered to us.

On Thursday, March 12, Tim Nolan stopped by in the afternoon to say good-bye before his return to Colorado the next day. We wish him well in his new environs. At the work session Thursday night, Jeff Kennard stopped by to pick up the air tank from the Model 740, as he has access to equipment to test the wall thickness. An AVRR meeting met in the museum and planned the way ahead so everything will be ready for the Egg Hunt trains on April 3 and 4.

The following 13 volunteers attended the work session on Thursday: Steve Bryce, Tim Ward, Paul Kratunis, Ted Kamen, Jerry Lucas, Bill Schwoebel, Jim Personti, Geoff Fallows, Eugene Maute, Gerhard Maute, Jared Schoenly, new volunteer Dennis Tiley, and Tom Marshall (in charge). More cypress was cut up for railroad ties, and a “standard” template was made for pre-drilling ties for 7-9/16” gauge, correct for tangent (straight) sections.

A new heat sink for the Mountain Wagon’s vaporizer was delivered and fit for brazing to the vaporizer coil itself. Extensions on the pilot and main fuel lines were temporarily attached so the burner, when completed, can be tested on the floor*. The duplex fuel pressure gauge on this car was checked over by removing the lens, cleaning the bezel and face, and checking the clearance of the pointers. It was then reassembled. The used railroad splice bars were painted with a special graphite coating. The back wall of the museum was patch-painted where the old wall-mounted air compressor for the sprinkler system had been removed, that corner was cleaned up, and the exhibits put back in place. The popcorn boiler was cleaned up and hydrostatically tested at 80# p.s.i. All is good. The parts from the Cretors popper that are to be nickel-plated were sorted and photographed, prior to a trip to the plating shop early next week.

On Saturday, Bill Schwoebel, Anne Cleary, Robert Hopkins, Ed Paschall, and new volunteer Dennis Tiley filled the drainage trench near the back building and began the repair of the damaged grade crossing in the same vicinity. Another section of track was assembled, and the newly brazed Mountain Wagon vaporizer was installed in the burner and the horizontal holes drilled through at the forks. Jerry Novak worked on the running boards of the ’37 Packard. *Note: In testing the burner on 3/15, all appears to be fine, but the exercise set off the fire alarm in the carriage house.