

July 30, 2007

Hello, Steam Team:

Every small town can boast of small business and community endeavors; a few were successful, many were not. Yorklyn was no exception. I'm sure there were many in the 19th century that none of us living can recall. I have been told of, or knew of personally, several from the 20th century.

The Yorklyn Club House was a joint venture of the Snuff and Fiber companies built about 1920. The snuff company provided the land next to the Snuff Mills and the fiber company put up most of the money to build a modern 2-story clubhouse for the benefit of the families who lived in the community (and whose breadwinners usually worked in one of the mills). On the first floor was a bowling alley, a barber shop, and some small rooms for card games and the like, with a covered porch around 2 sides of the building. The second floor housed an auditorium with a nice stage, curtain, and dressing rooms for stage shows and a projection booth for the showing of motion pictures. A reception was held here for my newly-married parents in 1922. Unfortunately, the endeavor was popular for a very short time, and I remember it in the 1930's as a storage building for the snuff mills. Just after World War II, however, I thought Yorklyn should have a movie theater, I approached Philip E. Touhey, superintendent of the snuff mills, and he agreed to let me open a movie house upstairs in connection with a community Boy's Club that was promoted by J. Calvin Hastings and myself. The snuff company bought the lumber and the boys supplied the labor to rebuild the outside fire escape, I bought a 16 mm. sound projector, and my father let us use the old folding chairs from the Yorklyn Gun Club. We advertised "old films" (not the latest releases) for showing on Tuesday and Friday evenings during the winter and early spring months. Although the seating was upgraded the second year, the operation was soon outdated by a new medium called television which put the "Club House Theater" out of business in 1948. Although many of the snuff mill buildings around it have burned or collapsed, the old clubhouse building is still standing.

Samuel E. Cooper (1872?-1948?) was an enterprising but unkempt bachelor who worked for the fiber company. His clothes made him resemble a bum or a tramp, but he was anything but that. In addition to his regular job, he operated country stores, first at Yorklyn (briefly) and then at Hamorton where the Kennett Pike (Route 52) joins the Baltimore Pike (Route 1) east of Longwood Gardens. The present Encore Shop occupies the old Cooper store. He owned a 1911 Stanley in partnership with J. Homer Kratz. When the suburban trolley line from Kennett Square to Brandywine Springs failed in 1922, Cooper and a couple of his friends bought the assets and tried to run it again, but it shut down permanently in May, 1923. I'm sure the rail and the overhead wire of the 12-mile railway through Yorklyn was scrapped for more than the investors had paid for the line.

Cooper also financed Grover C. Gregg in his first years of operating the Yorklyn store. The Greggs' second son, born in 1915, was named Samuel Cooper Gregg, who became well-known for the operation of Gregg's Bus Service many years later. Old Sam had a room on the 3rd floor of the Gregg house and he wouldn't let Mrs. Gregg in to clean his room. In the 1930's, his daily routine went like this: He would get up in mid-morning, get in his Dodge coupe from the early '20's with the seat worn out behind the wheel (he had to sit in the middle of the car), head for the Kennett Bank with the cash receipts from the previous day at the Hamorton store, make his deposit and get the needed change, and be at the store again by late morning. An employee must have opened the store in early morning. Then he would stay in the store as its only clerk until closing time about 9 P.M., head for Yorklyn with all his cash, and about once a week stop to see my father near the latter's bedtime (my dad never particularly appreciated these late-night visits).

In the mid '30's, Sam Cooper had an investment he wanted my father to see, so one Sunday morning I went with my dad to an old farmhouse along Duncan Road just south of Milltown Road. Cooper met us there and told my father what a great investment he had made; he had bought the land that later turned into the development named Cooper Farm.

When Sam died, his sister, Mrs. Samuel Dillon, had to clean out his room at Greggs' and settle his estate. The Dillons lived in a large new home in Westover Hills, in more recent years owned by Charles M. Cawley, who built a series of antique-car garages around the big house.

Bill Rule has worked briefly on Norman Schaut's car which came in last week. The engine is still frozen, but he has drained the fuel tank and freed up the hand pumps. Our strategy is now to attempt to fire up the car and with a little steam passing through the engine, maybe the pistons will break loose. Many of the valves on the car are badly stuck. Jerry Lucas and his team have made good progress in preparing an engine to go back in the Model H-5. Walter Higgins plans to make new wrist pins for this engine this week, possibly here where some of you who are interested can watch him do it. We will be using the engine that has been in the car, probably the original, but with a good cylinder block from the spare engine we had here. There are two main reasons for this: the spare engine was not equipped with a hook-up (it was from a 1907 car, not a 1908), and it did not have the more desirable pump drive. This Thursday, we can put the Museum back in order, as the newly-painted floor should be ready to take the weight of the cars.

The Ice Cream Run last Tuesday was successful for all who went, and the Model 735 performed well under the guidance of Steve Bryce and Butch Cannard. Other cars in the caravan were the Models 76, 87, and 607. Our last ice cream run of the season will be next Tuesday, August 7, when Mike May, our new president, will be here and plans to go with us. Several operators are looking forward to taking Stanleys to the Peach Festival at Middletown (DE) on Saturday, August 18, and driving them on the 60-mile round-trip.

Bob Reilly returned from Colorado last Monday and after catching up with office work here has been focusing on the summer edition of the "Herald" which we hope to have available in about a week. With our editor, Rob Robison, temporarily "out of business", Bob will be writing the feature article on the June Steam Car Tour, illustrating it with some of the many good photographs taken during that busy week. The Events Committee met last Thursday and considered many items on its agenda, including on and off-site events for the remainder of this year, and a suggested schedule for 2008. Definite conclusions have not been finalized. We have finally received a proposal for stabilizing the race bank near the railroad track. It looks promising, and the question will now be "when can it be done between on-site events?". This will be resolved soon.

Next week will be "Committee and Board Meeting" week, with Board Committee meetings taking place August 6 and 8, and the full Board on August 9. The following meetings have been requested by Mike May while he is at Auburn Heights: Finance Committee, Development Committee, Collections Committee, Education Committee, and the Executive Committee. It will be a busy time. On Friday, August 10, the Mays and the Reillys will be leaving here with the Model 87 in my trailer for a week-long trek of about 700 miles through Vermont. This is an "on your own" tour, stopping at 4 lodging places along the way, with no accompanying vehicle or trouble truck. I used to "eat up" challenges of this nature and have made my share of such trips during the past 60 years. Best wishes to all! Tom