

JULY 28, 2008 F.A.H.P. NEWS

Summertime, 1938: We seemed to have very nice weather during May and June of 1938. Toward the end of my ninth grade year at the new Wilmington Friends School in Alapocas, my father installed an overshot water wheel in the meadow near the rock garden at Auburn Heights, and a pump attached to this wheel supplied the water to flow through the garden, replacing the hydraulic rams that had been used previously. The Delaware State Shoot (trapshooting) was held at Yorklyn, and I won the Class D championship, breaking 91 and 94 for a 185 (out of 200) total. The third week in June, the Pennsylvania State Shoot was held at the Brinton Lake Gun Club near Concordville. My father's friend, Nathaniel C. Longmire, owned the club and he and his wife lived in the clubhouse during the summer months. It was a beautiful place to shoot, and while the club lasted at least 10 years, hosting the State Shoot in 1938 was its shining hour. We shot there for 4 days with beautiful weather, and the ladies of the Kennett New Century Club served the meals. The scores were high and on championship day, five 200-straight were broken. Walter Beaver of Berwyn won the State Championship after 75 straight in shoot-offs.

Since my father was successfully campaigning to be president of the Amateur Trapshooting Association, we traveled to more State Shoots than usual that summer, which pleased me very much. At the end of June, my mother and I went with him in his new '37 Packard Twelve to the New York State Shoot at Johnsonville, northeast of Troy. As we left there to go across southern Vermont and New Hampshire to Poland Spring, ME, the weather turned for the worse, and several days of rain persisted as we went on to Maplewood, NH, for the annual tournament there. The Red Clay Valley must have had more than normal rainfall while we were away. However, we seemed to have many days filled with sunshine through mid-July, before it started to rain again. I don't recall downpours, but the ground must have become saturated.

About 8 A.M. on July 25, just 70 years ago, my mother called to me to get up immediately as she heard a loud roar. What she heard was a wall of water rushing around the curve in Red Clay Creek at the State Line, surging over the fiber company's dam there, and heading down the meadow toward Auburn Heights. As I ran down the hill to the rock garden and crossed the bridge over the mill race to see the exciting event unfold, my father shouted to me to come back, as he feared the race bank on the far side would fail and be washed downstream. Indeed it was a wall of water; as the worst flood on the creek in the 20th century was fast engulfing everything in its path. I watched the water rise to the peak of the roof of the small water-wheel building, where a rat was perched until finally he was washed away. In close proximity to Auburn Heights, Joe DeStafney's bridge was washed away, and the Bengue Road bridge was knocked off its foundations. The covered bridge that carried Route 82 across the creek below Ashland was washed away (that bridge was about ½ mile downstream from the present Ashland covered bridge). George W. Pusey, owner and operator of the Ashland Flour Mill, lost his dam at Sharpless Road, and held an unofficial open house the following Sunday, showing spectators the damage around Ashland. Yorklyn School was hit hard, and there was 63" of water on the floor of #2 Fiber Mill. (The flood of 2003 was probably worse; reports were that there was "six to eight feet" of water on the same mill's floor, but that was in the 21st century).

Less than 2 weeks later, the Annual Yorklyn Trapshooting Tournament was held as if nothing had happened, and the weather was fine (and probably very hot, as was often the case in early August). Route 82 was closed for about a year and a half while a new bridge was built below Ashland. George Pusey rebuilt his dam, but he had only 4 more years to operate the mill. He died in January, 1943, and the mill never turned a wheel thereafter. The Snuff and Fiber mills were not out of business for more than a few days, and the railroad apparently suffered minimal damage. The clean up with manual labor was fast in 1938.

Richard Bernard supervised a very successful public event yesterday, July 27. As usual our corps of volunteers, supplemented by Dan Citron, Catherine Coin, and several Americorps volunteers, handled all the jobs required in a most professional manner. Our attendance was about 200, hampered by a downpour that lasted 45 minutes between 2:00 and 2:45. David Kee and his Dixieland singers were a hit, as were our two 100th-birthday cars, the Stanley Models H-5 and K, which gave rides to randomly selected people to their delight. Many thanks to all who helped get ready, and on the day itself.

The Events and Scheduling Committee will meet at 7 P.M. tomorrow, July 29, in the F.A.H.P. office. Our Volunteer Picnic will be held at Auburn Heights on Sunday, August 17, and the trip to "A Day on the Farm" at Worcester, PA, is scheduled for Sunday, August 24. The annual Threshermen's Reunion at Kinzers, PA, runs from Wednesday through Saturday, August 13-16. The quarterly Board Meeting of F.A.H.P. takes place on Thursday, August 14, at 7:30 P.M.

A number of maintenance items on the trains and cars will be addressed with the mechanical volunteers in the days and weeks ahead. Stay tuned! Tom