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How We Communicated Years Ago: To those who lived out their lives in the 20th century or before, today's instantaneous communications would seem impossible. Yet here they are in many forms, such as software, fax machines, cell phones, e-mail, smart phones, twitter, websites, and texting. Who tried to teach me about all these things? Someone of a younger generation did. Even if a friend is halfway 'round the planet, we can know what he or she is doing every minute. There are few surprises in the modern world.

Just over 100 years ago, Lizzie Marshall of Auburn Heights, my grandmother, would correspond by handwritten letters of two or more pages with her sister, Sadie Passmore, who lived off Old Kennett Road two miles away. These letters often described trips to places such as Wilmington and Philadelphia by family members, happenings around home, and illnesses affecting loved ones. As I've written before, my great-grandfather Joseph Mitchell (Lizzie's father), after tending market in Wilmington with his farm products, brought back word to the Hockessin area that President Lincoln had been assassinated. For country people in 1865, there was no faster way to get the news.

Samuel F. B. Morse had invented the telegraph in 1831, but the wires making it possible to transmit long-distance messages came with the expansion of the railroads. The Morse Code was a system of dots and dashes, sent through wires by a battery-operated transmitter. Young Tom Edison became an operator for the Grand Trunk Railway near his boyhood home in Port Huron, Michigan. In addition to the new lines along the railroads, a transatlantic cable was laid on the ocean floor in 1858 (not without problems), and President Buchanan sent greetings to Queen Victoria of Great Britain, which greeting was returned. "Wires" to and from the War Office in Washington and the battlefields were essential during the Civil War. Telegraphy was critical for railroad expansion, and wires on poles, usually 60 feet apart, were strung along the right-of-ways. In 1872, Joshua Heald, president of the new Wilmington & Western Railroad, was able to send a "wire" from Landenberg to Wilmington, advising that the first westbound train had reached its destination successfully. Telegrams could be sent by anyone but were usually used only for emergency situations as they were expensive. Except in the large cities where there would be a telegraph office, the station agent for the railroad was the telegraph operator. Those who lived in outlying areas with no railroad were left out of this new technology.

In 1876, Alexander Graham Bell invented a means to transmit the human voice and other sounds over a wire for several miles. Improved by the Edison people who were fast developing usable electricity in the large cities, telephones came into use, first in these cities and then to more rural areas (see "The Telephone Comes to Yorklyn" in the Weekly News of 10/2/06). Local calls were reasonable and in some cases free, but calls to or from far-distant places were very expensive. In most cases, subscribers would be on a "party line" with several other neighbors, until more expensive private lines became available.

Wireless telegraphy was invented by an Italian named Marconi in 1896, which started inventors on the road to transmitters and amplifiers to turn sound waves in the atmosphere into audible words and music. In Pittsburgh, America's most powerful radio station broadcast President Harding's Inaugural Address to those few who had a receiver (radio) in 1921. Radios and the various programs available to the average citizen were highly developed when television arrived soon after World War II.

So, how practical was it to eliminate those handwritten letters? Until 1933, a first-class letter in the U.S. could be mailed for 2 cents an ounce. In most cases, if it were mailed one day, it would be delivered the next, but until the 1930s, there was no regular Air Mail (and Air Mail cost about 15 cents per half ounce), and coast-to-coast letters could take four days. Fast passenger trains had railroad post offices, usually located in a partitioned section of the baggage car. Postcards, also considered first-class mail, cost 1 cent

until 1948. Unless there was serious illness in the family, long-distance calls were infrequent, as it probably cost about $3.50 for 3 minutes from Yorklyn (Hockessin Exchange) to Middletown. Was this expensive? Clifford Murray, longtime handyman at Auburn Heights, made $15 per week during the Depression. In 1943, when I feared being transferred into the infantry, I phoned my father from a pay phone in Providence, we talked for several minutes, and it cost me $17.50! I was being paid $50 per month as a buck private.

Telegrams were more affordable than phone calls for emergency situations. Western Union and Postal Telegraph were the principal suppliers of these services. Regular telegrams were charged for by the number of words, so it was financially prudent to keep the words to a minimum. A telegram was guaranteed to be delivered within two hours from the time it was sent, or something like that. However, night letters were cheaper and very popular. Twenty-five words could be sent for a base rate, with each word after that being charged for a small increase. A night letter received before midnight was delivered by 7:00 the next morning. To supplement uniformed young boys on their bicycles delivering telegrams and night letters to the door, the Western Union office in Wilmington would phone us at Yorklyn, read us the message, and offer to send a "hard" copy by mail if desired. Late in the evening of March 15, 1943, such a message was received at Auburn Heights, advising me to report for active duty immediately. In 1945, the home folks might not know for several weeks at a time where their young soldier was located. That made reunions much more memorable.

Work Report: On Tuesday, April 9, the following 13 volunteers were present: Steve Bryce (in charge), Jerry Novak, Lou Mandich, Bob Stransky, Emil Christofano, Mark Russell, Chuck Erikson, Bob Jordan, Paul Kratunis, Ted Kamen, Jeff Pollock, Jay Williams, and Tom Marshall.

The Model 607 was fired up with the engine in the chassis for the first time, and the pumps and several adjustments were checked out and corrected as everything turned on the jack. It was determined that the main oil pump plunger was way out of adjustment, but everything else worked well. The new brake lines arrived for the '37 Packard, and installation of these was begun (the shortest of these lines was left out of the shipment). The 735's rebuilt condenser was placed in the shell, and it's ready for installation on the car. The recovered seat cushions for the Mountain Wagon were returned.

The Events Committee, Anne Cleary, chair, held its monthly meeting Tuesday night. In addition to the chairperson, it was attended by Rose Ann Hoover, Art Sybell, Dan Citron, Brent McDougall, Jerry Novak, Steve Bryce, and Susan Randolph.

On Thursday, April 11, the following 12 volunteers were on hand: Tim Ward (in charge), Jim Personti, Art Wallace, Paul Kratunis, Geoff Fallows, Gerhard Maute, Eugene Maute, Bob Jordan, Ted Kamen, Jerry Koss, Steve Bryce, and Tom Marshall. On the Model 607, the oil pump, having been properly adjusted, was tested satisfactorily but soon will be set back, as it is pumping too much oil right now. The engine gears, pump drive bearings, and slides and wrist pins were checked and adjusted, where necessary, and the car was run on the jack for ½ hour before being blown down. It was noticed that the 7/16" line from the small oil reservoir to the pump was leaking at one of the flares, and a ¼" flare nut is cracked feeding the stack blower. Otherwise, the chassis is ready to be road-tested. The condenser was lifted in place on the Model 735, but it was discovered that the hood does not fit well, a condition that has existed for a long time. This condition is being addressed. Further progress was made on installation of the brake lines on the '37 Packard. The re-covered seat cushions were put in place on the Mountain Wagon, and the museum was straightened up for the visit of the Hudson Club on Saturday, 4/13.

Between sessions, Richard Bernard continued to paint museum stanchions, and our special contractor, Don Blevins, has almost completed the new retaining wall at one end of the railroad trestle.