

The Creek Road to Wilmington, 1930s: My father always preferred the “Creek Road,” although it only followed Red Clay Creek to Mount Cuba, and Route 82 ended at the Kennett Pike. On the other hand, my Uncle Warren Marshall preferred Old Wilmington Road and Lancaster Pike. Therefore, whichever family took my cousin Eleanor and me to school at 4th & West Streets determined our route. Under the title “Local Roads,” a small part of this story is covered in the “News” of 3/23/09.

Going down Creek Road, as we left the bustle of the active snuff, paper, and fibre mills in Yorklyn, there was one more industrial site to pass, and the mill building almost blocked Route 82 before we crossed the railroad. It was the paper “tape” mill of the Crowell Corporation, squeezed between Creek Road, the railroad, and the creek. This had been built as one of the Garrett Snuff Mills about 1846 and had been sold to Crowell in the big divestiture before 1910. A short distance beyond, the morning freight train, still with one passenger car in the early 1930s, was often stopped at the water tower along the track of the Landenberg Branch of the B & O Railroad. The grade crossings a few hundred feet on either side of this tank were protected only by a tingling bell, which often got stuck and tingled continuously.

Coming in the other direction we often passed Arthur A. Armstrong, an accountant who lived in Wilmington but worked at National Fibre in Yorklyn. “Army” always drove an old but very reliable car. The first I recall was a Franklin of 1920 vintage with a hood resembling a French Renault. The second was a 1928 Packard Model 526 six-cylinder sedan that had belonged to my grandmother and after her death to my father. By 1940, his third car was a Buick of about 1936. We would always “throw up our hand” as we passed, and “Army” would do the same.

At the junction of Ashland-Clinton School Road just above Ashland, mailboxes alongside the road served as a daily meeting place for George W. Pusey, who owned and operated the Ashland Flour Mill, and Tom Mullin, a bachelor farmer who lived with his sister in the 1737 brick house above the mailboxes. Pusey lived with his wife and two daughters in the comfortable frame house near the railroad (his older daughter Ruth had been my first-grade teacher in 1930-31). Mullin, whose property contained a large barn across the road to Clinton School from his home, had only one eye, and it was hard to know when he was looking at his conversationalist. A few years after Pusey’s death in 1943, Mullin was found dead floating in the creek near the present Ashland Nature Center. He was presumed to have died from a heart attack and drowning.

A dirt road with several names, one of which was Ice Box Road, followed a tiny stream from Creek Road above Mount Cuba past a hillside farm with its barn on a very steep slope about ½ mile from the main road. There was a milk platform where this dirt road joined Creek Road, and two bearded brothers, proprietors of the farm, brought their milk cans by horse-drawn cart to await the daily pick-up. We would wave, but the greeting was seldom returned; however, traffic passing this pick-up point was probably the extent of their recreation for the day. When they died, the farm fell into disrepair, the road became a dumping ground for trash, and it was finally closed. The Fieldstone Golf Club covers much of this area today.

Where Route 82 leaves Creek Road in the general area of Mount Cuba, Harry Frederick had a slaughter house next to his stone dwelling. When his son entered the business with him, a modern frame house was built on the property for him and his young family. Within a few years, the son died of cancer, and old Harry slowly gave up, the slaughter house was closed, and he passed away. His widow became a recluse and lived in the neglected stone house for many years thereafter.

The Edgar Hoopes Reservoir and how it changed the routing of Route 82 was covered in “Weekly News” stories of 9/10/07 and 3/23/09. The Shields Lumber and Coal Company was the only active business where the Wilmington & Northern Railroad crossed Kennett Pike at Greenville. It was frequent that we

would see a Reading Company “Camelback” steam locomotive heading the morning southbound train, and the grade crossing would be blocked for a few minutes until business was conducted and the train could move on. Going in Pennsylvania Avenue, T. E. “Mac” McBride operated a Texaco Station on the corner of Union Street, a favorite place for my father to fill the gas tank of his Packard. We would often see a main line passenger train on the B & O, headed by one of the famous “Presidents’ Class” locomotives, pulling away from the Delaware Avenue Station headed for Baltimore. All U.S. presidents from Washington to Cleveland had locomotives named for them, and it was fun to see how many Presidents pulled the morning train. Then we got to school.

Work Report: On Tuesday, November 5, the following 11 volunteers were on hand, as follows: Steve Bryce (in charge), Dennis Dragon, Bob Jordan, Ted Kamen, Tom Marshall, Kelly Williams, Brent McDougall, Gary Green, Tim Ward, Richard Bernard, Rose Ann Hoover, and possibly others.

On the Model 607, an angle hole was drilled through the dash for the wire to the dash light, and the location of the wire on the boiler side was determined. The car was road-tested for its expected use on Nov. 9. The speedometer drive still needs adjustment, which was studied. It was determined that the 3-tube indicator is set about 1” too low, which will be corrected soon. Steam Locomotive 401 was cleaned from its runs on November 3. The smoke box door caught on the wall as the engine was moved for cleaning, which accident bent the hinges. The door was removed for repair.

On Thursday, November 7, 15 volunteers answered the call: Bill Schwoebel (in charge), Steve Bryce, Bob Jordan, Ted Kamen, Jerry Koss, Mark Russell, Richard Bernard, Paul Kratunis, Tim Ward, Jim Personti, Brent McDougall, Bob Wilhelm, Rich Gregg, Sam Gregg, and Tom Marshall.

The smoke box door from Locomotive 401 was repaired and installed. On the 607 project, electric wiring and acetylene tubing for the headlights was addressed again. It was decided to use stainless brake tubing for the acetylene, and suitable wire was installed from the dash light to the switch box. Several more heavyweight stanchions were painted, along with the much-used stepping blocks (stools) utilized for loading and unloading passengers from our antique vehicles on Steamin’ Days.

The Stanley Models 71, 76, and 87 were prepped for our tour on Saturday, November 9, and a new water line near the pumps was run on the Model EX. The EX tested out well, but the 87 developed a sudden steam leak from the cylinder block on a test run on Friday. It is possible this is not serious.

On Saturday, our year-end volunteers’ tour took place on a cold but clear and pleasant day. The 37-mile route took us first to the Judge Morris Estate, part of White Clay Creek State Park, where we had a complimentary tour before traveling back roads to the Perkins Restaurant near Avondale for lunch attended by 33 people. Six of our Stanleys started, and five completed the trip, but the vaporizer broke off near the branch forks on the Model 740, which had to be towed home. Our ’37 Packard touring sedan, driven by Jerry Novak, also made the trip and provided welcome warmth for its passengers. Cars participating and their drivers were: 1908 Model EX (Dan Citron), 1910 Model 71 (Tom Marshall), 1913 Model 76 (Steve Bryce and Bill Rule), 1914 Model 607 (Kelly Williams), 1918 Model 735 (Mark Russell and Bob Stransky). Richard Bernard and Tim Ward were in the 740. Bob Wilhelm, in his modern car, took Steve Bryce from “Judge Morris” to Auburn Heights, wherefrom Steve towed the trailer to the 740 and loaded it for joining us at Perkins. Bill Rule took over the operation of the Model 76. In addition, the following cars joined us with their private owners: Rose Ann Hoover (’40 Packard), Lou Mandich (’18 Buick), Steve Jensen (’11 Stanley), and Bill Schwoebel (’29 Model A Ford). We were glad to welcome Dave Leon, who looked very well following his heart operation. A good time was had by all.