

William H. “Billy” Little (1860-1931): Billy Little grew up in the large stone house, built about 1817, across the road from the Hockessin Friends Meeting House. He first attended the octagonal Friends School on the Meeting House property until it closed in 1868, to be superseded by the first Hockessin Public School (District 29), on the corner of Lancaster Pike and Valley Road. Opened in 1869 like the public school at Auburn (Yorklyn), this school had eight grades, and only a few pupils went on to high school at a more distant location. It is not known whether Little attained a high school education.

As a young adult, he soon gained a reputation as one who could build or fix anything. With industry flourishing in Yorklyn, he was engaged by the American Snuff Company to build a row of frame tenant houses about 1902. Built with hand labor in a matter of a few weeks, these houses stand today as the “Lower Snuff Mill Row,” and have been individually owned since the 1960s. It is likely that Billy Little built some of the snuff mill rows that followed: the Upper Snuff Mill Row, the Polish Row, and the Stone Row, which was nicknamed the “Million Dollar Row” as it was built for managers and superintendents of the Snuff Mill. All these rows of houses have been restored and have had continuous occupancy for well over 100 years.

In 1913, Billy Little built a new house for himself and his wife, Lizzie. It faced Meeting House Road immediately behind the stone house where he had lived for over 50 years. The Little property comprised nearly 100 acres between Meeting House Road and Yorklyn Road. The year 1913 was also the time when the Marshalls were rapidly expanding their paper and fibre business in Yorklyn, and new mill buildings were being constructed near the railroad and present-day Yorklyn Road. Billy Little was hired by the National Fibre and Insulation Company as a full-time construction and maintenance man working directly with my father. The two got along famously, as each knew how to “fix things.” We have a photo of Billy Little standing on the platform alongside the new wooden water tank (with an unknown assistant) at the fibre mill about 1913. Harry Little, Billy and Lizzie’s son, who was my father’s age, lived with his wife on the third floor of Auburn Heights for a short time before my parents were married.

About 1920, National Fibre hired an efficiency expert, Manley P. Northam. He recommended to the Marshalls that Little be retired, as he was 60 years of age. In those days, it is doubtful that a pension went with retirement, and Little was not ready to retire. My father told his brother, his uncle, and his cousins, “If Billy Little goes, I go.” End of discussion. In 1926, however, my dad cut ties with the company, and I assume Little retired at that time. He died in 1931.

As mentioned, the Little property between Yorklyn and Hockessin contained about 100 acres. Land wasn’t worth much in those days. Lizzie Little continued to live in the 1913 house, which was on a plot of about five acres, until her death about 1941. During World War II, Kenneth L. Berry, a chemist with the DuPont Company, bought this property from her estate and lived there with his family until his death in 2007. It is now occupied by his son, Dennis Berry. Dennis’s brother Alan, an early active member of the Steam Team, lives in a modern house built on the property in the 1980s.

The original Little stone house built in 1817 was sold to Samuel C. Stovall, along with most of the 100 acres, about 1938. He and his wife, Esther “Sally,” and their son Stephen lived there, but much of the surrounding real estate was sold. In the early 1950s, Stovall sold the home to James A. Schulz, who moved in with his wife Marian and their three daughters. One of the girls is Kathryn Schulz Mitchell, mother of the “Ice Cream Man.” The house was owned briefly by Pete and Mary Jane Sanger in the 1990s, and he, too, was an early member of the Steam Team.

Work Report: On Tuesday, May 30, 12 volunteers turned out, as follows: John Bacino (in charge), Mark Bodenstab, Steve Bryce, Anne Cleary, Bob Jordan, Ted Kamen, Bob Koury, Tom Marshall, Brent McDougall, Mark Russell, Dennis Tiley and Bill Scheper.

The Auburn Valley trains were prepared for their runs on June 4. A second coat of “Poly” was applied to the new wheels for the Model 607. The Mountain Wagon was prepped for June 4 and future dates by checking all fuel and oil levels and tire pressures. The garage and shed floor was cleaned of grease and oil.

Plaster was applied to the dry-wall joints in the new shop ceiling. The '37 Packard was cleaned and polished for its upcoming move to the museum. The electric generator on the Model 87 was re-wired according to a diagram obtained by Mark Russell online, and the connections on the voltage regulator were checked. Its operation will be checked again at the earliest opportunity.

On Wednesday afternoon, the first day without rain for a long time, seven volunteers were on hand, and five of our cars were on the road! Those taking part were Jerry Lucas (in charge), Bill Schwoebel, Dave Leon, Mike Ciosek, Tom Marshall, Jerry Novak, and Larry Tennity.

Another practice session took place with the Rauch & Lang electric, with Jerry Novak “teaching” Larry Tennity. Novak then ran both Packards on the road for a few miles, and with minor adjustments, all was good. Their storage positions were swapped, with the '32 coming to the upper garage prior to its display at Yorklyn Day on June 4. The hand brake improvement on AVRR Locomotive 402 was advanced.

On the Mountain Wagon, a new plug and copper washer was installed on the 3-tube water-level indicator, oil was added to the sump for the axle-driven pump drive, and the car was driven about 6 miles. All appeared to be good, and the car will be thoroughly cleaned for its use on June 4. The Model 87 was fired up and driven a total of about 12 miles. For the first nine miles, the feed water heater was by-passed, and the pumps worked flawlessly. The electric generator also appeared to be 100%. For the last three miles with the heater connected again, the pumps failed, and in backing the car toward the garage, the left perch pole broke (chances are it had been broken for some time and just now let go).

On Thursday, June 1, nine volunteers were on hand: Dave Leon (in charge), Jim Personti, Geoff Fallows, Ted Kamen, Lou Mandich, Tim Ward, Bob Stransky, Devon Hall, and Tom Marshall.

Familiarization drives were conducted in the Model T Ford, with Lou Mandich “teaching” Tim Ward and Devon Hall. All went well, and the motor was successfully cranked and started several times. The perch pole on the Model 87 was patched by sliding a tight-fitting sleeve over the break and bolting it firmly in place. A coat of primer was applied to this patch. Also on the 87, several flare fittings were loosened in preparation for repairing a leak in an old union under the 3-tube indicator. With new fittings supplied by Bill Schwoebel, these leaks were addressed on Friday, 6/2.

On the Mountain Wagon, the new plug on the water-level indicator was tightened slightly and is now believed to be tight. The Gift Shop carts and the Cretors popper were brought from the museum to the upper garage for their use on June 4. On June 2, the Mountain Wagon was thoroughly cleaned and polished.

On June 3, a copper line was run from one of the blow-down valves of the Model 87, the boiler was fired up, and, with full boiler pressure, hot water was “blown down” through the feed water heater. The water blew out and flashed into steam, just as it does with a normal blow-down. If there was any kind of blockage, it could not be detected. On Monday, the heater will be hooked up again and tested.