

The Delaware Road: As a continuation of last week's story, the Delaware Railroad was built nearly the length of the state, north-to-south, in 1859 and changed Lower Delaware forever. No longer were farmers and fishermen cut off from the city markets of Wilmington, Philadelphia, and New York. For a reasonable fare, passengers could visit city attractions and take advantage of big-city shops. My grandfather, James T. Shallcross, commuted daily from Mount Pleasant to Wilmington in the 1890s, where he was Recorder of Deeds for New Castle County. Locals and railroad men alike always referred to the railroad as the "Delaware Road."

The Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad was built in the 1840s and followed the present Amtrak Northeast Corridor through Wilmington and northern Delaware. About halfway between Wilmington's passenger station and Newport, the Delaware Road branched southeastward, crossing the Christina River on a swinging bridge before passing under the future Du Pont Highway at Farnhurst, en route to its first major passenger stop on the west side of old New Castle. At New Castle heading south, the line made almost a 90-degree turn toward the southwest and utilized the original New Castle and Frenchtown right-of-way, abandoned 15 years before, which it followed for about 5 miles, crossing the future Du Pont Highway again at State Road and passing another station named "Bear." A mile or so beyond, the line left the old right-of-way and swung straight south, crossing the future Pomeroy & Newark Railroad at Porter, before passing through Kirkwood en route to its crossing of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal.

The original canal had a distinct bend where the Delaware Road crossed on a draw bridge. In the early 20th century, this bridge was always "up" unless a train was about to cross, giving preference to water traffic. Mount Pleasant was the first station south of the canal, and my grandmother told a story about a stranger on her train who responded to the conductor's call "Mount Pleasant!" as they approached the station with the comment, "It looks like Mount Misery to me." There was a flag stop at Armstrong, and then the growing community of Middletown that replaced Odessa in importance with the coming of the railroad. Townsend (pronounced by Delawareans as "Towns End") came next, wherefrom a branch line to Chestertown, Maryland, was soon constructed, and finally Blackbird, the last stop in New Castle County. Crossing Duck Creek upstream from Smyrna, the railroad was built to the west, and the community of Clayton, adjoining Smyrna, became a new railroad town. Here, another branch line went off to the southwest into Maryland, this 50-mile-long line serving many Eastern Shore (of Maryland) towns en route to its terminus at Easton.

Cheswold was the next town served by the railroad before it reached Dover, capital of the state. Many years after 1859, a fancy passenger station was built here on the west side of the business district. Dover was also the County Seat and centrally located in Kent County, but from here south where Delaware widens out, east to west, there were two main lines of population and opportunities for commerce, and the main line of the Delaware Road could follow only one of these lines (find out next week about the important decision made in 1859 and how it affected the building of the Du Pont Highway nearly 60 years later).

Work Report: Jerry Lucas was in charge of the work session on Tuesday and Bill Schwoebel on Thursday. A total of 14 volunteers answered the call on Tuesday and 19 on Thursday. The tear in the Mountain Wagon top was expertly repaired by Dave Leon, and the top was installed on the car. The top taper on the hanger strap was tightened by Jerry Lucas on the Model 87, and the oil pump repair on this car was completed. It was moved under its own power to the museum, along with the Model 76, the latter being pulled up the rear ramp in reverse by the larger car. The top of the hanger strap on the Model 735 was also tightened. The whistle valve on the 725 was repaired. Emil readied the Rauch & Lang for its appearance on Sept. 29, and it was placed on the grease rack temporarily. The garage floor and the shed floor outside it were cleaned of oil and grease. The two Packards were brought to the upper garage, as was the popcorn machine. Along with the Rauch and Lang, the 1932 Packard Twin Six was prepared for display in our Auburn Heights Invitational.

The museum was “touched up” for the opening of the Smithsonian exhibit Friday afternoon and Saturday, and chairs were set up for Greg Landrey’s lecture on early automobile advertising during our Sept. 29 car show. The Maute boys blew off the driveways and cleaned the A.V.R.R. grade crossings, and Bill Rule worked on the superheater of the Model 740, attempting to remove a broken nipple. Bill Schwoebel and his team removed the vaporizer from the Model EX and attempted to pull the stuck cables. The old Cruban unions on each side of the steam pipe loop on the Model 740 were removed, and the loop will be reused with modern 3/8” H.D. unions. The old unions date from World War II or before.

On the Model 607 reconstruction, Bob Jordan and his team of Ted Kamen, Dennis Dragon, Jim Personti, Geoff Fallows, Jeff Pollock, and several others made more progress on the piping and mechanical systems for this car. Tim Nolan continued to work on refinishing the wooden strips that go on the top of the doors. We were pleased to welcome a new volunteer, Pete Higgins (no relation to Walter), and we hope he will join us often.

The Inaugural Auburn Heights Invitational: We extend sincere thanks to everyone who made our inaugural Auburn Heights such an extraordinary success. From the exhibitors who shared some of the most magnificent classic and antique autos (plus 2 carriages and one sleigh!) to the volunteers who managed all the details associated with locating all the vehicles and making our visitors feel extra-special to the individuals and organization who contributed great items to our silent auction and raffle (as well as those who bid generously), we could never have orchestrated such a fantastic event without your support.

We welcomed more than 400 to the event, including nearly 100 friends and family of Joe Boxler, to whom the Boxler Education Fund is dedicated. We especially thank the Country Butcher and Woodside Farms for providing great fall fare and encourage all who enjoyed the event to share photos and memories as well as ideas on how we can improve the event in the future. Email your ideas and impressions to admin@auburnheights.org.