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Wild Rides on Wilmington & Western Railroad (B & O Branch), circa 1902: About 1901, my father was enrolled in Wilmington Friends School, then at 4th & West Streets, seven short blocks from the old Wilmington & Western (B & O's Landenberg Branch) station at Front and Market. He and his sister, Anna, and two Mitchell cousins rode the train each day to and from school. The Mitchells got on at Mill Creek (where Valley Road crossed the railroad west of Hockessin) and the Marshalls at Yorklyn. The morning train left Landenberg at 7:00, Yorklyn at 7:20, and arrived in Wilmington at 7:55. They returned on an afternoon train. A lot of stories have come down from their experiences on the train. My father and Henry C. Mitchell, his first cousin a few months older than he, loved to reminisce in their later years (Henry was the grandfather of the ice cream man, Jim Mitchell). Here are some of those reminiscences.

There was a "wild man" named Crossan who was one of the engineers on the line. He was known for doing some crazy things in order to make up time. One morning the train sped out of Yorklyn at a "terrible clip," and when it went through the rock cut above Mount Cuba, the cars swayed so badly they scraped the rocks on the side. Al Hughes, the senior conductor on the line, pulled the emergency cord, got the train stopped, and went up to the engine and "laid out" Crossan in no uncertain terms. The remainder of the trip was at a more leisurely pace. Coming home one day, Crossan was running the afternoon train. Pulling away too fast from one of the station stops, the pressure inside the cylinder stripped the threads and blew out one of the cylinder cocks. When the train stopped at Yorklyn, Crossan decided to fix it. He went over to Ed Dennison's woodpile (Dennison's store was next to the station) and whittled a round peg and drove it up into the open hole at one end of the cylinder. His repair was short-lived. As he pulled away from Yorklyn on the upgrade toward Hockessin, the plug blew out, and from there to Landenberg, a lot of power was lost as escaping steam caused a searing hiss with each stroke of the cylinder.

Another time, Crossan with the morning train was rolling along down the straight-away between Mount Cuba and Wooddale Quarry, and he didn't see John O'Neal's horse and buggy approaching the grade crossing at Barley Mill Road. O'Neal got across the track and was hit straight on by the locomotive's pilot (cow-catcher). His buggy was shattered into pieces, and the old man was thrown out. Fortunately, he was not seriously hurt. Coming home in the afternoon one day, the "boys," probably encouraged by my father, hitched a ride in the locomotive's cab. They were having a grand time, but the agent at Ashland spotted them in the cab and reported it to the authorities. That was the end of their cab rides.

Every four years (and to a lesser extent, every two), election day was a time to celebrate, regardless of who won. The afternoon train would carry many celebrants to Wilmington, where they would get drunk and await the election returns. The train crew working the late night train back to the country usually had a discipline problem. One such night after the westbound train crossed the "S" trestle, the conductor called out "*Yorklyn!*" One poor fellow ran out onto the vestibule and jumped off. Unfortunately, the train was still ¼ mile short of Yorklyn station, and he landed in a stagnant pool alongside the track (that pool is still there). Another time, brakeman Charlie Ryan, a son-in-law of conductor Al Hughes, tried to put a drunk off the train at one of the station stops. The drunk protested and kicked Charlie in the leg. His leg became infected, and it was amputated. About 1913, my father sold him a Stanley steamer and had it equipped with hand controls.