

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, August 21, 2006

The Beginnings of the Auburn Valley Railroad: In 1941, my father visited Martin S. Lewis in Wilmington, California, on our 12,000-mile trip in the '37 Packard Twelve. Mr. Lewis, an accomplished draftsman and machinist, had established a small business called Little Engines to sell castings and drawings to amateur hobbyists who wanted to build their own scale-model steam locomotives, now referred to as "live steamers." Shortly thereafter, my father bought the package to build a 3/4-inch-scale 4-8-4, on which he worked during World War II, completing it in 1945, before I returned to civilian life. He named this little beauty for me and took it to several hobby shows in the late 1940s, operating it in place with steam from a Stanley car outside the building housing the show. It is now on display in our museum.

The desire for a larger locomotive to run on a railroad that could carry passengers remained strong, however, and in the mid-1950s, Martin Lewis offered castings and drawings for an engine twice as large, his 1-1/2"-scale 4-8-4 or "Northern type" locomotive. Lewis himself began building the first of these locomotives, and his fellow Californian, Seymour Johnson, ordered and completed one of the first of these larger engines for his Canoga Valley Line. My father was also among the first customers and began work on his 4-8-4 in the late 1950s. As completion neared after 7,500 hours of work by my father, he and I began to discuss how and where we could build a railroad on which to operate this new beauty. In March 1960, he engaged Everett Hollingsworth of Fairville and his partner to lay out and grade for the original loop around the grounds of Auburn Heights. With the major grading completed, they nailed together and installed the 10-foot-long track sections using 2 x 2 redwood ties, built the turntable and its pit, constructed a trestle over the bank behind the museum, and installed removable grates across the driveway near the front gate, with the track depressed in a trough below. Several tiny passenger cars were hurriedly built with the help of Paul Wollaston, a local carpenter, and friends were invited to ride for the first time on my father's 75th birthday, August 5, 1960. The Auburn Valley Railroad was born.

With minor modifications, one of which eliminated the awkward removable grates in the driveway in favor of a wooden grade crossing, the public was invited to come and ride on several Sundays during the fall of 1960, and the little railroad ride was very popular. Historic Red Clay Valley, Inc. (HRCV) had been formed about a year earlier, its main objective being to establish a steam passenger service on the Landenberg Branch of the B & O Railroad, which soon became known by the line's original name, the Wilmington & Western. Plans were made to operate the Auburn Valley for the benefit on HRCV and to place two trains in service for the 1961 season. HRCV's volunteer members would make this operation possible.

Martin Lewis died about 1959, and my father eventually convinced Mrs. Lewis that she should sell him her husband's partially completed prototype. My father's original Auburn Valley locomotive had been numbered 401, and the hastily completed Lewis engine became the 402. Both have served the Auburn Valley well since 1961, with some sort of service being provided in about half of the 45 years between then and now. HRCV volunteers operated the Auburn Valley for five seasons (1961-65), and 33,000 passengers were carried, raising \$15,000 for Historic Red Clay Valley, Inc. (The continuing story of the Auburn Valley will be covered next week).