

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, August 28, 2006

History of the Auburn Valley, 1971–Present: Very shortly after my father died in October 1969, I determined that I should open his museum and the grounds of Auburn Heights on a more regular basis, and Weldin Stumpf became my partner in this endeavor in February 1970. It was decided to call the facility the Magic Age of Steam, and the Auburn Valley Railroad was perhaps the most important part of our anticipated operation.

Although the museum building was greatly improved with many new operating exhibits, the railroad and the grounds received the most extensive changes. An artificial pond was built on the sloping north lawn, which required a major embankment, extensive earth moving, and an off-site water supply. A new driveway was built around the south and east sides of the big house so that Mountain Wagon rides could be provided without reversing the vehicle. The pond and driveway wiped out much of the original Auburn Valley rail line. The original line, coming behind the museum close to where it is today, turned almost to the angle of the loading dock and then climbed toward the rose arbor, passing West Yorklyn station on the upper side of the building. It continued to climb on a 3 percent grade, passing below the sun dial and soon occupying the route of the present east driveway, passing the old flag pole at a place we called “Summit,” as this was the highest point on the railroad. Dropping sharply across the front lawn toward the main driveway, it crossed about 20 feet above the present crossing near the gate posts, and continued toward the middle of the present pond. From there, it followed around the hill to the turntable, still in its original location. From the turntable to the starting point (mentioned above), the location was almost the same as at present. There were passing tracks at West Yorklyn, Summit, and near Table Junction behind the garage.

Marvin Klair, Bob Reilly, Jake Lafferty, Bob McGovern Jr., Ray Smith and Jim Wilson helped Weldin Stumpf and me prepare the grounds and build the new railroad. Stumpf built the double-tracked trestle across the old vegetable garden, cut and welded the full-size railroad tank car bodies to form the tunnel, and formed the approaches for the pouring of the tunnel's wing walls. Marvin Klair, with his 1945 gasoline tractor, did all the earth moving and grading for the pond, tunnel, new railroad bed, and new driveway. Starting at the same point mentioned above, the line with its two tracks crossed the trestle, passed West Yorklyn station on the lower side, and then ran almost level to the east approach to the tunnel where the upgrade became about 2 percent. Passing through the tunnel on this grade and crossing the driveway at the lowest point possible, it then followed on the top of the new pond embankment, crossed the pond's spillway, and returned to the turntable area that we still called Table Junction. With this new construction, much less grade was required, and nearly half the railroad was double-tracked. In September 1971, the Magic Age of Steam was ready to open!