

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, March 22, 2010

**The Wilmington & Western Railroad:** This past Saturday, several of us attended the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary dinner of Historic Red Clay Valley, Inc., the “parent” of the present Wilmington & Western Railroad. The program brought back many memories.

Using Route 82 daily from Yorklyn to my travel office in Wilmington in the 1950s, as I paralleled the railroad several places I thought of the stories my father told when he rode the train to school just after 1900. I had never witnessed real passenger service on the Landenberg Branch of the B & O, and I fantasized how great it would be if that could happen again. In 1958, I decided to do something about it. George Sargisson was the executive director of Recreation Promotion and Service, Inc., an organization started by W. W. “Chick” Laird in 1945 to assist people with recreational ideas in fulfilling their goals. I knew George, I asked him about it, and he said immediately that we should talk to Clayton M. Hoff, who had retired from the DuPont Company in 1945 to establish the Brandywine Valley Association. On a nice fall afternoon in 1958, Sargisson, Hoff, and I walked much of the line, and they were impressed with its beauty. At the conclusion of our walk, Clayton Hoff insisted we should visit Roy Magargal at the Greenbank Mill, and he told me that this operation, too, should be preserved.

The next winter, George Sargisson and I visited the main office of the B & O Railroad in a wonderful, ornate office building at #2 North Charles Street in Baltimore. Our purpose was to generate interest among B & O officials to lease the Landenberg Branch, or a portion of it, on weekends when no freight service existed, to a non-profit volunteer organization to be established for the operation of steam passenger trains. We were wined and dined, but nothing came of the effort. In July 1959, a prominent group of local business men was assembled at the Yorklyn Gun Club, and C. L. Kroll of the B & O in Baltimore attended. I laid out the plan, the *News Journal* gave us a nice story, but again the idea died. The B & O had no serious interest; there was no precedent for such a thing, and the rail unions were too strong. Despite the discouraging news, Historic Red Clay Valley, Inc. was incorporated in 1960, soon had a membership approaching 100, and engaged in other historic activities while biding its time.

William Schmidt from B & O's main office came to the valley in 1963, I drove him around in my father's 1913 Stanley Model 76, and he said he would do what he could to get our ideas in motion. Still again, nothing happened. Early in 1964, Alto Smith, Pete Steele, Leroy Scheuerman, George Sargisson and I visited Governor Elbert N. Carvel, then nearing the end of his second term, in his Dover office. We made a presentation, and the Governor liked it. He told us his old roommate in college, Doug Turnbull, was a vice president of the B & O, and within a few hours they talked on the phone about our project. We met with Mr. Turnbull and explained our objective. This time, the wheels began to turn, but it was far from a “done deal.”

Both Governor Carvel and the B & O gave me the names of the heads of the several railroad operating unions who had to approve the idea of volunteers running the trains. This was one of the toughest jobs I ever attempted, and it took time. I wrote countless letters (usually they were unanswered), visited the union leaders in their homes, and attended brotherhood meetings. In late summer of 1965, we had our agreement, weighted heavily in favor of the B & O.