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The Railroad in Yorklyn: Local millers along Red Clay Creek and Mill Creek, as well as the Board of Trade in Wilmington, were anxious to have a railroad to transport goods to market and to open the Port of Wilmington to the vast lands to the west. Soon after the Civil War, proponents of “our rail line to the West” began holding meetings, the most important of which was held in 1869 on Spencer Chandler’s lawn in Hockessin (Walkers’ Florists owned and occupied this property until recently). Joshua T. Heald, who had been born in 1826 on a farm along the present Benge Road in Yorklyn, was president of the Board of Trade and, along with the Red Clay Valley’s many millers, favored the route up the Red Clay, which was about two miles longer than a possible Mill Creek route. In either case, Hockessin, with its blossoming kaolin industry, would be on the line, which was temporarily laid out to Chandlerville, where it would connect with the north-south Pomeroy and Newark Railroad (P & N), still under construction. When the P & N was completed about 1870 and the Wilmington & Western in 1872, Chandlerville became Landenberg, and Auburn became Yorklyn.

Along the Red Clay, there were mills at Marshallton, Greenbank, Faulkland, Wooddale, Mount Cuba, Ashland, and the Garrett Snuff Mills and the Clark woolen mill at Auburn. The latter, the Marshall Brothers paper mill from 1890 until 2008, is now owned by the State of Delaware and will be managed by the Division of Parks and Recreation along with the Auburn Heights Preserve.

In addition to serving as an outlet for iron, spices, snuff, wool, and meal ground in the numerous grist mills, there was a demand for coal as the larger mills were converted from water power to steam. Passenger service with three or four trains a day in each direction provided easy access for country people to visit and shop in the cities, mostly Wilmington. There was either a frame station building, 20 x 40 feet, or a boarding platform built along the track at each of the mills, along with a few more, requiring passenger trains to stop, on average, almost once per mile. The first trains on the Wilmington & Western Railroad ran in the fall of 1872 with Joshua Heald as its president, but the railroad went bankrupt in 1877 as a result of the Panic of 1873 and the price wars that followed. Reorganized as the Delaware Western with the same officers, it became profitable and was bought out in 1883 by the Baltimore & Philadelphia Railroad, a subsidiary of the B & O, as the latter pushed its trackage eastward from Baltimore toward Philadelphia. Two miles of the original Wilmington & Western, now in Wilsmere Yard, became part of the B & O’s main line.

Coming up the creek, which the railroad always called westbound, at Yorklyn the first siding and boarding platform was at what the railroad called “Lower Mill, Delaware.” The mill here had been built as the Garretts’ lower snuff mill about 1845 and was converted for the manufacture of gummed tape by the Crowell Corporation in the early 20th century. The siding was on the creek bank, roughly paralleling the long “S” trestle recently rebuilt following the flood of 2003. The mill itself was sandwiched between this siding and Route 82 and operated until it was burned to the ground in 1964.

Next came the main snuff mills themselves, where the siding required a railroad bridge across the creek, then a series of turnouts in the mill complex for the switching of cars. The passenger and freight station came next on the line, with a siding or “team track” behind the building for the use of the general public when a carload for a nearby customer was received. Carloads of clay targets for the Yorklyn Gun Club were unloaded from this siding. As the fibre mills culminating in the main plant of NVF Company were built near the station starting in 1904, a number of additional sidings were required to handle incoming and outgoing freight. The last freight handled on the line was in 1984, after Historic Red Clay Valley, Inc. had bought the Landenberg Branch from the successor to the B & O. A subsidiary of the present tourist railroad still publishes a freight tariff to most communities along the railroad, and is in a position to handle freight car shipments to these points should the demand resurface.