

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, January 10, 2011

**The End of a Country Club:** The *Weekly News* of July 14, 2008, told of the sale of Hercules, Inc. to the Ashland Chemical Company. About a month ago, the local newspaper told us of the final closing of the old Hercules Country Club and its golf course, so the property can be developed. For quite a few years, neither Hercules nor its successor operated the club; it was privately managed and known as Delaware National Country Club.

The recent news story mentioned that executives of Hercules Powder Company bought several farms along Lancaster Pike west of Wilmington in 1937 to establish a private club and golf course. From my memory, I would have thought it was a few years earlier than that. In any event, a clubhouse and nine-hole golf course were built, which were greatly expanded over the next 20 years. The Hercules Experimental Station and its power house down the hill along the Wilmington & Western Railroad (then the Landenberg Branch of the B & O) were immediately adjacent. Being heavily involved in the manufacture of sporting gunpowder, officials of Hercules wanted to hold a "night shoot" on the grounds in the 1930s, and they borrowed floodlights from my father's Yorklyn Gun Club to illuminate the clay targets thrown from their temporary trap.

Although not a golfer, I have many pleasant memories of the Hercules Country Club and its successor, Delaware National. In the 1950s, I showed travel films in the clubhouse, at the invitation of Hercules employees. In 1961, the first annual meeting of Historic Red Clay Valley, Inc. (HRCV) was held there at the invitation of Alto J. Smith, a Hercules executive who was later president of HRCV. Our speaker was Don Halleck, one of the vice-presidents of the Strasburg Railroad, just then starting its successful tourist operation. Subsequent annual meetings of HRCV were held there. Charlie Bradshaw, then president of the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad in Colorado, was the guest speaker in 1990.

When Hercules leased the country club operation to a group that called themselves Delaware National Country Club, it seemed that little had changed, and the club was well run. HRCV had numerous annual dinner meetings there, the most recent being its 50<sup>th</sup> annual celebration in 2010. At the conclusion of our Eastern Invitational Steam Car Tour, the final banquet was held at Delaware National on June 22, 2007.

Apparently, the old club with its approximately 200 acres is owned by Pettinaro Enterprises, which in turn has a contract with Toll Brothers, who most likely will fill the acreage with town houses or condominiums.