

**How the Wilmington & Western Rail Road Was Revived:** After several years of study, the original Wilmington & Western was built from Wilmington to Landenberg, Pennsylvania, a distance of 20 miles, and the line opened with a special excursion in October 1872. The deep rock cuts along Red Clay Creek and the long wooden trestle across Broad Run were outstanding features of the line. Joshua T. Heald, president of Wilmington's Board of Trade, who had been born at Auburn (Yorklyn) in 1826, was the first president of the W & W and its chief promoter. Price wars as a result of the Panic of 1873 forced many small railroads into bankruptcy, and this line was no exception. Reorganized in 1877 as the Delaware Western with the same W & W officers, it became prosperous and was bought by the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad as it pushed eastward from Baltimore in 1883. For the next 25 years, it was one of the most profitable branch lines in the B & O system.

My interest in the "Branch" resulted mostly from the stories my father told when he and his siblings and cousins rode the train before and after 1900 from Mill Creek (Hockessin) and Yorklyn to attend Wilmington Friends School. As an eight-year-old, he remembered being at the Yorklyn station when the afternoon train from Wilmington passed through. With the passenger-coach windows open, he (and probably his parents) listened as his aunt and uncle, Howard and Lizzie Mitchell, excitedly told about their visit to the 1893 Columbian National Exposition in Chicago, from which they were returning. My dad also told me of many experiences he had riding the train to Wilmington a few years later and some of the real characters who also rode and operated the trains.

From the early 1930s, I would ride down Route 82 parallel to a portion of the Landenberg Branch and envision what it must have been like in earlier years. At the last, one passenger car was included in the morning freight train, but even that had been discontinued in 1931. Two 4-6-0 steam locomotives handled the daily freights that served customers at several mills along the line, the power house at the new Hercules Experimental Station and the lumber yard at Hockessin. The turntable at Landenberg had been abandoned, so the steam locomotives reversed for the return trip to Wilsmere Yard, where the Branch trains were made up. The warning ropes for trainmen "walking the cars" still hung from their posts at both sides of overhead bridges at Old Wilmington Road and at the railroad cut at Ashland (this short highway bridge is gone) and at the steel truss railroad bridge over the Red Clay Creek. In 1942, the line was cut back with the abandonment of trackage west of Limestone Road and the dismantling of the Broad Run Trestle. But as I paralleled the track traveling Route 82 in the 1930s and again in the 1950s, I thought, "Wouldn't it be great if the 'old days' could be replicated"?

In 1958, I got nerve enough to mention this wild idea to my father. I don't think he thought it was practical, but he encouraged me to try. I knew George Sargisson, director of Recreation Promotion & Service in Wilmington, and Clayton Hoff, who had founded the Brandywine Valley Association and the Red Clay Valley Association, both environmental groups involved in preserving the integrity of the valleys in their jurisdiction. I invited both of them to "walk the line" from Yorklyn to Greenbank, which we did on a beautiful fall day in 1958. They were impressed with the Red Clay Valley's natural beauty as it could be seen from a train. At the conclusion of our walk, Hoff insisted we should visit Roy Magargal at the Greenbank Mill, who was still grinding meal by water power on his stone burrs. Since the mill was next to the railroad, he thought they should be tied together.

With this behind us, Sargisson and I made an appointment with the Baltimore & Ohio's main office in Baltimore to explore the idea of the B & O leasing the Branch, or a portion of it, on weekends when no freight service was operated. The front man for the railroad was C. L. Kroll, who wined and dined us, listened to our proposition, politely said they would consider it, and promptly dismissed the idea. Not to be defeated, however, I decided, with George Sargisson's help, to try to sell the idea to prominent business leaders in our community. About 20 such people, and Mr. Kroll from the B & O, were invited to a summer supper at the Yorklyn Gun Club in 1959, where I outlined the plan. It was favorably received, although few thought it would come to fruition. Anthony Higgins of the News Journal papers wrote a very nice article promoting the idea. Again, Mr. Kroll was noncommittal.

Despite little encouragement, I “barged ahead” as if it were going to happen. Steam locomotives were being scrapped at an alarming rate, and they could be found of the right size and specifications to be practical on the “Branch.” Leroy Benge and I flew to London, Ontario, in June 1959 to examine two 2-6-0 “Moguls” offered for sale at scrap price by Canadian National Railways. Roy recommended the newer of the two, built in 1910, as having the better boiler. We paid the asking price of \$4,750, and the locomotive was towed on its own wheels to Yorklyn in November that year (it eventually became W & W #92, and was the only locomotive pulling passenger trains from 1966 until 1972). Late in 1959, we also found an original 4-4-0 American-type locomotive (built by ALCO in 1909) for sale in Louisiana, and I inspected it in January 1960. It, too, which became W & W #98, was purchased at scrap price and was eventually ready for service in 1973. From the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western at Keyser Valley Yard in Scranton, we bought four open-vestibule steel coaches at \$700 each early in 1961. All this on optimism and little else. Enough people believed in what we were doing to help financially.

It was necessary to have an organization, as 25 or more people had heard about the idea and wanted to move it forward. Wanting to enlist the interest of people interested in local history, and having no railroad on which to operate, an organization was incorporated as a non-profit in 1960 called Historic Red Clay Valley, Inc (HRCV). With somewhat broader appeal, HRCV sponsored walks in the valley, historic lectures, photo days in cooperation with the Delaware Camera Club, and the operation of the miniature Auburn Valley Railroad to raise money for the greater goal. The all-volunteer A.V.R.R. operation netted the organization \$15,000 between 1961 and 1965.

Through the early 1960s, there was no movement on the part of the B & O. In 1963, an official named Schmidt visited, we showed him around, and gave him a long ride in one of our Stanleys. He was very friendly and seemed sincere about trying to work toward a lease for the Landenberg Branch. Again, nothing happened. Still undaunted, HRCV bought a tiny frame station from the Pennsylvania Railroad at Kennedyville, Maryland, and volunteers dismantled it in 1963 and moved the pieces to Greenbank, where it was erected at trackside two years later. In 1964, the Greenbank Mill was up for sale for \$10,000, and with the urging of Clayton Hoff and others, HRCV bought it and retained Roy Magargal to teach early milling to those in HRCV who were interested.

Early in 1964, we sought political help. About five of us visited Governor Elbert N. Carvel in his Dover office and explained what we wanted to do. The Governor liked the idea, thought for a minute, and said he had roomed in college with a man named Doug Turnbull, who was an officer of the B & O. He placed a call to Mr. Turnbull, and within a few days we were in the latter’s office in Baltimore, again outlining the plan. This time, the wheels began to turn. B & O management had decided they could do it, but the powerful railroad unions wanted no parts of it. Governor Carvel knew some rail union leaders in Delaware, and I approached them with no encouragement on their part. Why should hobbyists be allowed to operate trains without pay on trunk lines governed by the Interstate Commerce Commission? There was no precedent for anything so ridiculous (until I found one). In 1962, W. Nelson Blount, president of Ocean Spray Cranberry Company and founder of Steamtown had worked out an arrangement with the Boston & Maine Railroad to run steam passenger trains for 11 miles from Keene, New Hampshire northwest toward Bellows Falls, Vermont. Volunteers were allowed to run the trains, usually with Blount himself at the throttle of a steam locomotive. This still did not convince local union men.

Jack Paradee, a Pennsylvania Railroad conductor who was head of one of the local unions, liked our idea and tried to help. He invited me to attend a union meeting, at which a union speaker lectured those in attendance on how they should hate their employer and everything that railroad management stood for. The B & O head office also put us in touch with their man who worked out union contracts. He was frank and practical. He told us that he would get nowhere with our proposal by itself. He said that when the unions wanted a concession from the railroad that the B & O could accept, he would include our agreement as a small favor to the B & O. In late

summer of 1965, things were coming together for a final contract for leasing the “Branch” from Marshallton to Mount Cuba on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays.

After a lot of red tape, HRCV finally leased from the Board of Corrections about two acres along the track at Greenbank for a passenger station and parking lot. We leased from the B & O a property along the track at Marshallton, where volunteers built a pole barn engine house and siding tracks off the Landenberg Branch. At last, the new W & W had a place to store its equipment, after generous (mostly free) leases from the Worth Brothers at Yorklyn, NVF at Yorklyn, Haveg Corporation at Marshallton, and Allied Surfaces (owned by Chick Laird) in the old American Car and Foundry Yards in east Wilmington. It was hoped that operations on the “Branch” could begin in October 1965, but better heads prevailed, and the date was set for Memorial Day weekend in 1966, when the new station area at Greenbank was being completed. I showed an amateur color and sound film promoting the new operation to over 30 groups in 1965-66. Thirty-six thousand tickets were sold, many in advance, for the 1966 season. The revived Wilmington and Western has now operated passenger trains for 52 seasons.