

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, September 10, 2007

The Edgar Hoopes Reservoir for the City of Wilmington: In a few days several of our cars will be traveling to the Hagley Museum's Annual Car Show, and our route crosses a causeway over the northern end of a 2-mile-long reservoir that was built in 1932 as an auxiliary water supply for the City of Wilmington. The reservoir is 2 miles long, about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile wide in most places, and according to my calculation (which may not be right) holds about four billion gallons of water. Building a dam about 60 feet high to span a narrow valley $\frac{1}{4}$ mile north of Red Clay Creek above Wooddale, water from a tiny stream was harnessed to provide the reservoir. The flow from this stream plus normal rainfall would not have filled the reservoir for many years, however, so a pipe was run from the Brandywine, and water from this much-larger stream was pumped into the new cavity; as I recall, the reservoir was full within a few months of the dam's completion.

Before 1932, a small dam $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles "upstream" from the present one had supplied water to a breast wheel that turned the machinery in the Hillside Mill just below said dam. Above this dam was a small but scenic lake, and the road to Wilmington (now Route 82) ran across the dam and along the lake for $\frac{1}{4}$ mile. Probably in the first 10 years of the 20th century, T. Coleman du Pont bought much of the property around this lake, along with the mill, the property downstream from it, and also up the hillside toward Mount Cuba. He converted the mill into a summer residence, with awnings above the windows (many of which were probably added to give better ventilation). The gardens built below the mill were open to the public without charge a few days each year. In September 1929, my father, with his 16 mm. movie camera, captured my mother and me walking through the gardens. I'm not sure whether the mill building was razed or just left there, but it and several more farm buildings downstream were soon underwater as the new reservoir was filled in 1932. The new dam was a local tourist attraction, and the public could enjoy parking below and walking through the woods before going across the top on a fenced walkway.

The new reservoir required the re-routing of a few roads. There had been a dirt road roughly paralleling Centerville Road and about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile west of it, but most notably the road now known as Route 82 needed re-routing for about one mile.. The old road, from the Mount Cuba area to Kennett Pike (Route 52), used to go straight down the hill from the serpentine uphill road through the woods to the mill just described. After swinging left along the lake, it turned right toward Kennett Pike and passed through what is now Valley Garden Park, finally joining the present 82 on high ground about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile west of Route 52. The one-room schoolhouse known as Walnut Green is on the new route; it may have been the last one-room public school in Delaware, closing in 1948.

I remember two incidents that occurred about 1929 in the vicinity of the old mill. Once my mother's Packard turned completely around on the ice, formed where the water from the lake crossed the road and spilled over the dam. No one was in sight, and no harm was done, but she was shaken up. Another time in heavy fog, my father was between the lake bank and a car coming the other way in the middle of the road. The mild collision did minimal damage, but I saw my dad throw the left front hubcap from the Packard into the lake.