

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, October 20, 2014

Men's Barber Shops, 1928- : Frequenting a barber shop was always an adventure when I was young. Some men went daily to be shaved, which usually cost about 15 cents. I really don't remember the shelf or shelves of individually owned shaving mugs, often with the owner's name and an attractive picture thereon, in which the barber would mix up his customer's lather to spread over the shaving areas of the man's face and neck. In my time, the barber would simply mix up some brushless cream with his hands and apply it to the area to be shaved. My father always shaved himself (at least in my time), and by 1950, shops had almost given up the service of daily shaves.

Yorklyn had two barber shops, possibly not at the same time. Edward J. McGovern had a makeshift store built on pilings in the meadow on the Hockessin side of the Yorklyn bridge and a rickety boardwalk around this little building led to a barber shop. I was taken there once or twice before I was six years old. This store and the building in which it was located barely survived the covered bridge that was replaced by the current bridge at the end of Yorklyn Road in 1929. My second remembrance was in the clubhouse building on Snuff Mill property, still standing. Built by the George W. Helme Company and National Fibre as a community center about 1921, this building contained an auditorium with a projection booth, a bowling alley and several tiny stores, one of which was the barber shop. Again I was taken here, but I don't remember much about the haircut or the experience. Hockessin had a barber shop next to the firehouse, which closed sometime after World War II.

At the seashore where we spent several weeks each summer, Rehoboth had a building with an arcade on the south side of Rehoboth Avenue about ½ block from the boardwalk. Postmaster Dan Conant had the post office at the far end of the arcade and going to and from pedestrians passed several small stores, one of which was a barber shop (another was a souvenir shop that sold Uncle Wiggily books for 35 cents). In the 1930s, a haircut here cost a quarter, but children my age were 15 cents. At the other end of the spectrum, places like railroad stations and big hotels in large cities would have a shop with 10 or more barbers chairs in a line, each attended by a busy barber. Many customers also took advantage of a shoe shine for 10 to 15 cents. I once used the shop in the basement of the Statler Hotel in Boston, which was especially busy on Saturdays during World War II, when servicemen from all over New England came to Boston for a day or two "on the town."

From our home at Auburn Heights, I was taken to many shops in Kennett Square and Wilmington over the years. John Dettori had a small shop on North Union Street in Kennett with an assistant barber named Tom. Tom commuted from Wilmington and when gasoline rationing began in 1942, he switched to a shop closer to home. Usually after school, I would be taken to one of two Wilmington shops. The first was Mike's barber shop on Pennsylvania Avenue just west of Du Pont Street, where Mike and his brother, Tony, were excellent barbers. My father liked a men's tailor named Arthur Josefsen whose shop was on the 3rd floor of the Morris Plan Bank Building on Shipley Street between 9th and 10th. Allegretta and Fye had a barber shop on the second floor, and we started frequenting this shop. Charlie Allegretta was Frank du Pont's "man" in Delaware's General Assembly and was a very good barber, for which he was probably overqualified. Harry Fye, unfortunately, was old and going blind and could not see well enough to provide a good haircut. Charlie kept him on, however, as he had no other means of support. The shop was later moved to Tatnall Street between 10th and 11th, opposite an entrance to the Nemours Building.

Three generations of Burtons have operated a barber shop on West State Street in Kennett, although my times there have been few. It is still going strong and is an important sports center as well as a barbershop. Back to John Dettori: After World War II, he had a modern shop with two other barbers across from Burtons' in one of Jake Noznesky's buildings, and in the 1950s, John moved the shop to the rear of the American Legion Building on South Broad Street. It was a humorous adventure to frequent this shop. George Rudolph, a bachelor who took his meals at the Kennett Kandy Kitchen, complemented John as barber #2. A little Greek fellow named Alexander worked the counter and made sandwiches at the Kandy Kitchen. He was known as "Little Alec" and visited John's barber shop daily, mostly to read the paper. John and George would innocently start a

conversation: “Did you hear about the woman who was poisoned at the Kandy Kitchen last night? I hear she almost died, etc. etc.” Little Alec would fidget in his chair. Finally, he would throw down the paper and walk out in disgust. Something like this was a daily routine in John’s shop, with most customers finding it highly amusing. One day when Little Alec needed a haircut, John cut off his necktie “by mistake.”

When John Dettori retired, he sold the shop to a young barber from Drexel Hill, who was a very nice fellow but a terrible barber. Within two years the shop closed. George went to work in a small shop on South Union Street run by a man named Jim. This shop is now run by the Fragale brothers, and I still go there. Haircuts are now \$15, a bargain compared to rates in the cities but about 30 times what they were before World War II.