

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, June 5, 2017

William H. "Billy" Little (1860-1931): Billy Little grew up in the large stone house, built about 1817, across the road from the Hockessin Friends Meeting House. He first attended the octagonal Friends School on the Meeting House property until it closed in 1868, to be superceded by the first Hockessin Public School (District 29), on the corner of Lancaster Pike and Valley Road. Opened in 1869 like the public school at Auburn (Yorklyn), this school had eight grades, and only a few pupils went on to high school at a more distant location. It is not known whether Little attained a high school education.

As a young adult, he soon gained a reputation as one who could build or fix anything. With industry flourishing in Yorklyn, he was engaged by the American Snuff Company to build a row of frame tenant houses about 1902. Built with hand labor in a matter of a few weeks, these houses stand today as the "Lower Snuff Mill Row," and have been individually owned since the 1960s. It is likely that Billy Little built some of the snuff mill rows that followed: the Upper Snuff Mill Row, the Polish Row, and the Stone Row, which was nicknamed the "Million Dollar Row" as it was built for managers and superintendents of the Snuff Mill. All these rows of houses have been restored and have had continuous occupancy for well over 100 years.

In 1913, Billy Little built a new house for himself and his wife, Lizzie. It faced Meeting House Road immediately behind the stone house where he had lived for over 50 years. The Little property comprised nearly 100 acres between Meeting House Road and Yorklyn Road. The year 1913 was also the time when the Marshalls were rapidly expanding their paper and fibre business in Yorklyn, and new mill buildings were being constructed near the railroad and present-day Yorklyn Road. Billy Little was hired by the National Fibre and Insulation Company as a full-time construction and maintenance man working directly with my father. The two got along famously, as each knew how to "fix things." We have a photo of Billy Little standing on the platform alongside the new wooden water tank (with an unknown assistant) at the fibre mill about 1913. Harry Little, Billy and Lizzie's son, who was my father's age, lived with his wife on the third floor of Auburn Heights for a short time before my parents were married.

About 1920, National Fibre hired an efficiency expert, Manley P. Northam. He recommended to the Marshalls that Little be retired, as he was 60 years of age. In those days, it is doubtful that a pension went with retirement, and Little was not ready to retire. My father told his brother, his uncle, and his cousins, "If Billy Little goes, I go." End of discussion. In 1926, however, my dad cut ties with the company, and I assume Little retired at that time. He died in 1931.

As mentioned, the Little property between Yorklyn and Hockessin contained about 100 acres. Land wasn't worth much in those days. Lizzie Little continued to live in the 1913 house, which was on a plot of about five acres, until her death about 1941. During World War II, Kenneth L. Berry, a chemist with the DuPont Company, bought this property from her estate and lived there with his family until his death in 2007. It is now occupied by his son, Dennis Berry. Dennis's brother Alan, an early active member of the Steam Team, lives in a modern house built on the property in the 1980s.

The original Little stone house built in 1817 was sold to Samuel C. Stovall, along with most of the 100 acres, about 1938. He and his wife, Esther "Sally," and their son Stephen lived there, but much of the surrounding real estate was sold. In the early 1950s, Stovall sold the home to James A. Schulz, who moved in with his wife Marian and their three daughters. One of the girls is Kathryn Schulz Mitchell, mother of the "Ice Cream Man." The house was owned briefly by Pete and Mary Jane Sanger in the 1990s, and he, too, was an early member of the Steam Team.