

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, November 12, 2007

Yorklyn in the News: Yorklyn was the subject of two lead stories in the *News Journal* this week, one directly, one not so directly. The first was a history of the NVF Company and its possible demise; the other was a great story on the Wilmington & Western Railroad and its celebration of Veterans' Day, which took place on Sunday.

Those of us who live in the community know what tough times have prevailed at NVF over the past several years. Apparently, a decision affecting the outcome of the company will be forthcoming very soon now: whether NVF will be closing down for good or whether long-hoped-for orders for its newest laminated product will come through and give it new life. Although I hesitate to forecast the outcome, either way it goes can benefit the community if sensible planning can prevail. However, the result can be devastating to Yorklyn without a positive plan to improve or demolish the old buildings (or some of both).

The *News Journal* article told of better times. Although the vulcanized fiber business prospered from the time the big mills were built in 1911–12 until the 1960s, no time was busier than the World War II years. When I finished my initial semester at M.I.T. in January 1943, I had already enlisted in the Enlisted Reserve Corps and came home awaiting a call to active duty. My mother said that if I wouldn't go back to continue my studies, I would have to do something to help the war effort, so I went to work for National Fibre, where I could walk to work. My uncle, J. Warren Marshall, controlled the company in those days, and I was put to work in the shipping room (near the railroad). It was the first time I had to have a Social Security number. Although the mills were running 24-7 with three daily shifts, the shipping room operated on only two shifts: 8:00 to 4:00, and 4:00 to midnight. I worked both shifts but mostly 4:00 to midnight. I learned to operate a banding machine for banding rolled fibre but not before a few fingers required band aids. I remember how cold it was walking the half mile to Auburn Heights just after midnight in February. While I was there, long eastbound trains came through Yorklyn, usually in late afternoon it seemed, bringing rail to be scrapped or used elsewhere from the Landenberg Branch between Southwood (Route 7) and Landenberg, including that from the Broad Run Trestle. On March 15, my orders came to report for active duty immediately. Uncle Warren offered me a permanent job after my discharge in 1946, but I declined. He had no sons, and he was hopeful of getting younger family members involved.

The Wilmington & Western Railroad attracted a sell-out crowd for Veterans' Day, after the great article in Saturday's newspaper. The ceremony, starting at 11:30 Sunday morning at Greenbank Station, honored all military veterans and celebrated two important anniversaries. Wilmington & Western Locomotive #58, donated to the railroad by Yorklyn residents Brian and Linda Woodcock, was built by Baldwin Locomotive Works in Philadelphia just 100 years ago, and was designated the Veterans' Locomotive when it went into service on the W&W five or six years ago. Woodcock was president of the W&W when the line was bought from the successors of the B&O Railroad in 1982, just 25 years ago. A huge birthday cake was cut to celebrate both anniversaries, there were several speeches, and an honor guard from the Delaware Military College raised the colors. Then #58 pulled the seven-car train to Mount Cuba.