

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, May 1, 2006

B & O Trip to Hockessin and Annapolis, 1949: April 30 and May 1, 1949, were significant dates in Yorklyn. On Saturday, the last day of April, the first-ever New Castle County Championship was held at the Yorklyn Gun Club. It was won by Carl L. McCallister of Newport with a score of 97 x 100. Earlier in April, the Kent County Championship was held on the Harrington Fair Grounds, and in May the same for Sussex County was held near Selbyville. I was secretary-treasurer of the Delaware State Trapshooting Association at the time.

On Sunday, May 1, the Philadelphia Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society ran a steam and electric excursion from the B & O passenger station at 24th & Chestnut Streets in Philadelphia, down the B & O's main line, then up the "Branch" to Hockessin. Upon the return to the main line, the train went on to Baltimore, where the passengers visited the present B & O Museum collection in Bailey's Roundhouse near Camden Station, then took the electric cars of the old Baltimore & Annapolis Railway to Annapolis, and finally returning to Philadelphia to end the trip.

Those from here who wanted to go could board at the B & O's Delaware Avenue station in Wilmington. Homer Kratz drove my father and me to Wilmington, where we were joined by Joe Mitchell of the Woodside Farm family. The main line Pacific (not one of the 5300s) arrived on time with its eight-car train, and we boarded. At Wilsmere Yard, the main line engine cut off, and the two 10-wheelers then used on the Branch were hooked on, one at each end of the train, heading east and west, respectively. Cautiously we proceeded up the Branch, as the veteran train crew knew it had been 25 years or so since a passenger train had used these rails. The station alongside the tracks at Hockessin was still standing, and its roof overhangs were welcome as a drizzle descended on the local crowd and the train pulled to a stop. One in the crowd was Francis M. Walker, age 100, who had ridden the Branch train on a daily basis from his home near Hockessin to his law practice in Wilmington. My father asked him if he would like one last ride, and when he replied in the affirmative, the crew agreed to stop the train at Yorklyn to let him off. His nieces, who had brought him to see the train, drove to Yorklyn and picked him up.

When we got back to Wilsmere Yard, the main line Pacific picked us up again, and we headed for Baltimore, Bailey's Roundhouse, and the antiquated electric cars at Camden Station. The trip to Annapolis and back to Baltimore was probably the last passenger train ever to run on that line. Again back on the B & O, steam brought us back to Wilmington, and as we stood on the platform after getting off, the sharp bark of the Pacific's exhaust echoed across the hills as the train crossed the Brandywine and picked up speed on the long grade toward Philadelphia. It was a great weekend.