

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, April 12, 2010

**Hockessin's Bicentennial, 1976:** Actually, the Hockessin plans started in 1974 when a local committee was formed to stage an outstanding historical event. I served on this committee headed by Lee Murch, who lived in Gateway Farms. Owners of historic properties were encouraged to spruce up their homes or businesses and if possible open them to the public on one or more special days. The Hockessin Community Club had Laura Farley do a pen-and-ink sketch of Auburn Heights, with the hope it could be one of the houses opened. Since my mother was ill on the second floor, however, she was insistent that she did not want people to see the house as it was then, so the tours did not happen (I bought Laura Farley's sketch, and we have used it on numerous occasions). In 1975, the Hockessin Friends Meeting House was remodeled under the leadership of Sanford Smith, Clayton Ranck, and Ken and Peg Berry, removing from the interior many of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century modifications.

Kay Lord directed a play in 1975, which was staged at the H. B. du Pont Middle School, depicting early settlers of the area doing the things we thought they did. I took the part of an elderly Quaker, which I have always been. Young John Murch, age about six, was my grandson. I don't remember much else about this major production, but it was well attended. Through Francis J. Swift, a member of the New Castle County Council, a large tract of land was purchased by the county in the triangle between Old Lancaster Pike and Valley Road, which was named Hockessin Bicentennial Park. Upon Swift's death about two years later, it was renamed in his memory.

Back in 1974, Joseph R. Lake Jr., who had been a local historian since he was a teenager in the late 1950s, was commissioned to write a bicentennial history of Hockessin. He set out to do a major pictorial history, assembled his many photographs and wrote the rough text, divided it into meaningful chapters, and asked expert typist Louise Jackson if she would put together his hand-written notes for legible further editing. Louise, Bud Pragoff, and I were the editors and were also in charge of getting the layout completed and the product published. For numerous Sunday afternoons, Bud Pragoff, a retired Hercules official, and I would sit at the dining room table at Auburn Heights and read Lake's text to each other, back and forth, until we thought we had it right. Bud knew a good layout man, Bob Carlisle, also retired from Hercules, who helped us greatly with the layout and made several trips with us to visit the selected printer, Intelligencer Publishing Company of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Local artist Walt Stan painted the colorful jacket showing an early B & O passenger train pulling into the Hockessin Station next to old Lancaster Pike. The promised time of delivery was Memorial Day 1976, and the first lot of books were picked up by their purchasers in the old Lamborn Library building that weekend. Prior to that we had sold 518 books at a pre-publication price of \$13.50 each. The list price was \$15, we had ordered a total of 1,500 books, and they were gone and "out of print" by 1978. A few were sold through local bookstores, but most were sold through the Hockessin Branch of the Delaware Trust Company, whose manager, Nestor Lopez, kept the supply in the bank vault as a community service. (In the 1990s, Joe Lake published a second edition.)

July 4, 1976, was on a Sunday. The Hockessin festivities began Friday night with an Ecumenical Service at St. Mary's Catholic Church. On Saturday, all kinds of arts and crafts were shown in the center of Hockessin, and the Wilmington & Western Railroad set up a ticket office in a caboose parked next to the Hockessin Fire House and operated round-trips every hour to and from Ashland. The big day was yet to come.

Other than perhaps a small firemen's parade, Hockessin had never had a parade, at least not since the very early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was to be a *big* one! Only one other community in northern Delaware had planned a parade on July 4 that year. Something like 15 fire companies took part, and many floats of all kinds and several marching bands came down the hill on Old Lancaster Pike from the parking lot at St. Mary's. Old 98 of the Wilmington & Western Railroad frequently saluted members of the parade with blasts from its steam whistle as they crossed the tracks. Councilman Swift and his granddaughter rode through the parade with me in our 1905 Model CX Stanley, painted red and blue with white stripes for the Bicentennial Year. There were lesser activities on Monday to wind up the long weekend. Except for one or two years, Hockessin has held a successful July 4<sup>th</sup> parade annually ever since. Large cities and tourist facilities across the country were greatly

disappointed by the Bicentennial crowds, but small places like Hockessin thrived on our 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, as many people wanted to spend that summer near home.