

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, February 13, 2012

**Yorklyn Road and a 96-Year-Old Story:** The present Yorklyn Road was not one of the original thoroughfares in the Yorklyn-Hockessin area. In fact, the original road, almost on its present location, was built in 1863, but only from the snuff mills at Auburn (Yorklyn) to Old Wilmington Road. There was no connection from this junction into Hockessin until much later. About  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile from the Yorklyn bridge and just beyond the old Sharpless farmhouse, still standing and in good repair, the original location had reverse bends to accommodate a wide gully in the hill to the north. This gully was partially filled in and the road straightened about 1920.

The paving on Yorklyn Road when I grew up was narrow, rough, and crowned. A good driver would follow the middle of the road until he saw a car coming in the opposite direction. It was then a feat of prowess to get over far enough to pass without hitting a serious pot hole near the edge of the paving. There was no shoulder. Each time it was paved, the crown got higher. National Fibre was starting to receive and ship by truck, rather than entirely by rail, and trucks of ever-increasing size used this road. So did the Short Line Bus that bounced along at 35 m.p.h. When I first arrived home from the service on August 13, 1946, I rode the bus in this manner before reaching Auburn Heights. Yorklyn Road was greatly improved and widened in 1949.

I have often written about the Benge family, mostly John (1864–1936) and his youngest son Leroy (1903–1982), both of whom were superintendents of the Marshall Brothers paper mill and both of whom owned Stanley steamers. Benge Road, which passes one side of Auburn Heights, was named for the family about 1970. Weekly News stories of 6/20/05 and 6/27/05 described two of old John's exploits. It can truly be said he was a "character."

Two of our Auburn Valley Railroad cars are named "Laura R. Sharpless" (#870) and "Emma S. Pierson" (#896). They were Ruth Marshall's grandmother and mother, respectively. Ruth recently turned up a letter written by her grandmother to her mother when the latter was a student at George School in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. The letter is dated November 18, 1915, and I quote in part: "Benges tried to pass a team up at crossroads, 5:30 P.M. Their car skidded, turned upside down on the trolley tracks. The old man was stiffened up a little and Roy's back was hurt some, not been to school this week. Dr. said nothing was broken. It's a wonder they were not all killed."

Since this is the first I've known of this accident, I can't add much to it, except to say that the "old man" must have been John, who was then 51 (Roy would have been 12), and "crossroads" must have been the intersection of Yorklyn and Old Wilmington roads, as we know the trolley line crossed Old Wilmington Road between this intersection and the railroad. John Benge owned three used Stanleys, all bought from my father between about 1910 and 1917, and I believe the car involved here to be the second one, which I have thought was a 1911 Model 71. Quite possibly this is the same car we think he drove off the end of the pier at Tolchester Beach, Maryland, perhaps the following summer.