

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, October 1, 2012

**The Delaware Road:** As a continuation of last week's story, the Delaware Railroad was built nearly the length of the state, north-to-south, in 1859 and changed Lower Delaware forever. No longer were farmers and fishermen cut off from the city markets of Wilmington, Philadelphia, and New York. For a reasonable fare, passengers could visit city attractions and take advantage of big-city shops. My grandfather, James T. Shallcross, commuted daily from Mount Pleasant to Wilmington in the 1890s, where he was Recorder of Deeds for New Castle County. Locals and railroad men alike always referred to the railroad as the "Delaware Road."

The Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad was built in the 1840s and followed the present Amtrak Northeast Corridor through Wilmington and northern Delaware. About halfway between Wilmington's passenger station and Newport, the Delaware Road branched southeastward, crossing the Christina River on a swinging bridge before passing under the future Du Pont Highway at Farnhurst, en route to its first major passenger stop on the west side of old New Castle. At New Castle heading south, the line made almost a 90-degree turn toward the southwest and utilized the original New Castle and Frenchtown right-of-way, abandoned 15 years before, which it followed for about 5 miles, crossing the future Du Pont Highway again at State Road and passing another station named "Bear." A mile or so beyond, the line left the old right-of-way and swung straight south, crossing the future Pomeroy & Newark Railroad at Porter, before passing through Kirkwood en route to its crossing of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal.

The original canal had a distinct bend where the Delaware Road crossed on a draw bridge. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, this bridge was always "up" unless a train was about to cross, giving preference to water traffic. Mount Pleasant was the first station south of the canal, and my grandmother told a story about a stranger on her train who responded to the conductor's call "Mount Pleasant!" as they approached the station with the comment, "It looks like Mount Misery to me." There was a flag stop at Armstrong, and then the growing community of Middletown that replaced Odessa in importance with the coming of the railroad. Townsend (pronounced by Delawareans as "Towns End") came next, wherefrom a branch line to Chestertown, Maryland, was soon constructed, and finally Blackbird, the last stop in New Castle County. Crossing Duck Creek upstream from Smyrna, the railroad was built to the west, and the community of Clayton, adjoining Smyrna, became a new railroad town. Here, another branch line went off to the southwest into Maryland, this 50-mile-long line serving many Eastern Shore (of Maryland) towns en route to its terminus at Easton.

Cheswold was the next town served by the railroad before it reached Dover, capital of the state. Many years after 1859, a fancy passenger station was built here on the west side of the business district. Dover was also the County Seat and centrally located in Kent County, but from here south where Delaware widens out, east to west, there were two main lines of population and opportunities for commerce, and the main line of the Delaware Road could follow only one of these lines (find out next week about the important decision made in 1859 and how it affected the building of the Du Pont Highway nearly 60 years later).