

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, September 28, 2015

**Tidbits from Years Ago:** About 20 of us in the Stanley driving program have just completed a long-weekend mini-tour to the Dover area, which brought to mind some early stories and childhood memories.

We traveled the tree-shaded State Street in Dover from north to south, and it's a pleasant change from the busy highways around the state Capital, now with a population of 40,000 residents. Actually State Street was a portion of the 1918–1919 Coleman DuPont Highway, most of which was an 18-foot-wide concrete road from Claymont in the north to Selbyville in the south, a distance of over 100 miles. Until the mid-1930s, my parents used State Street to and from Rehoboth, where they had a summer home after 1927. It was the only way to go. In those days, about ½ mile south of the center of town on the east side of State Street were at least two large homes, each with lengthy front lawns full of fresh garden produce for sale, especially in late summer. My mother always had to stop, sample, and buy.

On our return from Dover on Sunday, we stopped in Odessa, a tiny historic village of about 500 residents and several historic homes open to the public. Before there was a settlement at Middletown, four miles to the west, Odessa was a thriving river port, then called Cantwell's Bridge. Grain and timber were shipped down the Appoquinimink Creek to the Delaware Bay and then north to Wilmington and Philadelphia. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, a man named Daniel Corbit profited from this busy trade and, along with his neighbors, built some fine and stately homes on the bluff above the navigable creek. The original Odessa was a busy Ukrainian port on the Black Sea, so about 1840 Cantwell's Bridge was renamed Odessa. My maternal grandparents were married in Odessa's new Drawyers Presbyterian Church in 1872, no longer in existence (Old Drawyers is a historic church and burial ground about ¾ mile north of town).

When the Delaware Railroad was built from Wilmington to Delmar (and soon to Salisbury) in 1859, it by-passed Odessa, and Middletown prospered along the tracks that opened up lower Delaware to outside commerce. With river traffic declining in favor of the railroad, Middletown soon became the larger and more vibrant of the two towns. A four-mile electric trolley line was built from the Port of Odessa to the railroad at Middletown about 1907, but it met with limited success and lasted less than five years. When the DuPont Highway was built in 1918, it by-passed Middletown in favor of Odessa. Nevertheless, in the 1930s Middletown maintained a population of about 1,200, whereas Odessa was not more than 400. Today, Middletown counts 20,000, more or less.

About 1920, my mother's bachelor brothers (both were married late in life), Eugene H. Shallcross (1883–1966) and Edwin E. Shallcross (1891–1995), got a government contract to build a four-mile road across the marsh from Port Penn to Delaware City. Earlier attempts had met with little success, and the area was known to contain quick-sand, which some accounts claimed could swallow up a team of mules. They basically built the road on pilings, and to get the heavy timbers in place, they constructed a temporary railroad across the marsh. They rented a "dinkey," a tiny steam locomotive, and several four-wheeled flat cars to move the material. Other details on how they completed the project are unknown to me, but three miles of the present Delaware Route 9, over which the Stanley cars passed just south of the Reedy Point Canal Bridge yesterday, is the successor to my uncles' road.