

A High Spot in My Life: York County Parks Department Adds New Life to the Hanover Junction Railroad Station

by Roger E. Shaffer

On Tuesday, August 3, 2004, I went to York County as a guest of the York County Parks Department. After arriving in York, I went directly to the Parks Director, Tom Brant's Office. After a short visit we went to lunch at Tom's club, which is near the Park Headquarters. After lunch we made a tour visit to Rocky Ridge Park. Tom's comments about the Park made it a most enjoyable visit. I had no idea Rocky Ridge was so large and had very fine facilities.

We returned to Tom's office, as he had a scheduled meeting to attend. While he attended the meeting, I relaxed in the park headquarters area of very nice surroundings. The meeting was not long lasting and afterward Tom took me to see my sister-in-law, Mildred.

Mildred and I had chicken-corn soup for supper and spent a nice summer evening together. Before bedtime we went to Wendy's for a frostee, which made the pleasant summer evening very pleasant. End of day one.

The next morning, Mildred and I went on a short shopping trip and then out to an early lunch.

Tom came to pick me up at 3:00 P.M. to go to Hanover Junction. We went via Brillharts and viewed portions of York County which were unfamiliar to me. This proved to be quite interesting for York County has some very wonderful scenery.

At Glatfelter's Station we entered the Rail-Trail and drove through Smyser to Hanover Junction. The rail trail is exceptionally well maintained. Between Glatfelter and Hanover Junction there are no road crossings.

We arrived at Hanover Junction about 4:45 P.M. and then Tom and I toured the old station building checking into the rooms of the three floors. This was the evening for the picnic to be enjoyed at the station. The picnic was to honor volunteers and greeters at the New Freedom and Hanover Junction Stations.

While Tom was making arrangements for the party which was to begin at 6:00 P.M., I roamed around the outside of the building. The first spot to visit was the nearby bridge which crosses the Codorus Creek, to view the location of our "old swimming hole." The immediate area is quite different from that which I remember as a kid, but the interior of the building brought back many memories.

The picnic was to have volunteers and greeters from the museums at Hanover Junction and New Freedom with other guests to attend also. I considered myself as an invited guest. Food and

refreshment were served in the building, with facilities outside to enjoy the food. It was a pleasant summer evening to enjoy the food in this manner.

Our next move was to go indoors. The group assembled in the waiting room area. I would guess there were 35-40 persons in attendance.

I had been selected to appear before the audience and to relate some of my memories of growing up and living in the station house. Tom Brant introduced me as the son of the last station agent at Hanover Junction, and as well added my age of 91. This rather surprised me, but I mention this about my age at this point because I will refer to it later.

This was easy for me, and I guess I stood before the group for possibly 15 minutes, which I thought was the end of my part of the program. Well, that was only the beginning, since questions from the group went on for another 45 minutes. Fortunately, I had answers for the questioning audience. Here are some of the questions: How many trains passed in a day? How fast did they go? Did you have mail service? What was a mail train? What industries did Hanover Junction have? Any stores? What was life like living in a railroad station? How did you keep warm in the winter? Did you have electricity? How did you get along after dark? Where did you go to school? How many were there in your family? What was "Bum Park?" What were some of the sounds you remember around the station? What is your earliest recollection of the area? I did not record the questions or answers but these are representative questions that were asked. The entire audience seemed very receptive to my comments. While talking, I noted numerous smiles or a nod of the head indicating agreement. This experience made, for me, an evening that was a high spot in my life.

After I sat down, Tom presented me with two paintings, one of the Hanover Junction station in a frame made from wood taken from the building during restoration; another, a water color painting of Howard Tunnel. That was not all. He also presented to me with a piece of rail, ½ inch thick, with an identifying tag attached to the rail and also a cap with the York County Parks label attached. Talk about surprises! The piece of rail bears the identifying information: "Northern Central Railway Commemorative Rail Section 8 - 400, July 1994 Edition."

After the formalities of the evening, and during a more informal period of activities, one lady asked me, "Why didn't Tom give your right age when he introduced you?" My answer was "I believe he did." She walked away shaking her head. Disbelief, maybe?



On this visit to Hanover Junction, I brought and presented my model of Howard Tunnel to the Parks Association. It was immediately placed in a plastic display case for safe keeping in the museum. End of day two.

Day three of this York County visit began at 6:00 A.M. The reason for this early start was that Tom was to pick me up at Mildred's at 7:15 A.M. This he did, and we took off to New Freedom. Today's schedule called for a motor car ride on the old Northern Central from New Freedom to Hyde, just outside of York. Upon arrival in New Freedom, there were three motor cars waiting. These cars, gasoline powered, were individual and privately owned. These motorcar owners have formed a club and from time to time they take trips on various railroads when they can make an agreement for usage of their rails.

Our trip began at 8:15, and left the rail yard and the "Y" connection of the Stewartstown Railroad at New Freedom. The grade of the railroad, as we went northward, became more evident. Traveling in this manner the grade was so much more evident than when traveling in a railroad coach. Track curvature was also so much more noticeable.

Tom Brant, Sandra Pruiett, the operator and I occupied the motor car in which I rode. On the way I held the microphone and Sandi operated the tape recorder. As we progressed on our journey, I pointed out things I thought would be of interest, such as station locations, signal positions, factories etc.

Our first main stop over was Hanover Junction, with the restoration of the "old station house." It provided considerable conversation with our group.

The next stop was Howard Tunnel, the oldest railroad tunnel in continued use in the United States. Here again our group participated in very interesting discussion.

At the end of the journey, and in preparation for return to New Freedom, the motor cars were turned. I thought they would have to be turned by using manpower as were the old hand pumped operating vehicles used when I was a kid. However, each car was equipped with a hydraulic operated turntable that lifted the car, turned it, and returned it to the rails.

During our motor car return to New Freedom, the three cars came to a complete stop south of Seitzland. I inquired why. Our operator said, "See that horse coming on the rail trail? That is why we stopped." Rail trail rules specify that horses have right-of-way because there is the possibility that the motor noise may influence actions of the horse. After their passing, we continued our trip.

We returned to New Freedom at 1:25 P.M., completing a 42-mile trip. Sandi, Tom and I had lunch at the small restaurant installed in the new station building.

After lunch we returned to Mildred's place. The next appointment was with Don and Dee Patton at 5:00 P.M., who came to take Mildred and me for a dinner engagement. We had a very nice visit and shared a good dinner and lots of discussion with Don and his wife.

By 7:30 P.M. we were back at our starting location, due to the fact that Don and his wife had another engagement later that evening. They went directly home after leaving us.

After Don left, Mildred called Myrna and Darby. After very few words on the phone they said they would come to visit us. This they did, and I can assure there was no want for conversation during this time. Their leaving brought Day 3 to an end.

Day 4. At 11:00 A.M. Jim Brown came to get me and take me to Hellertown. On our return trip we stopped at the Hometown Diner for lunch and found it to be a very satisfying meal.

End of day 4 brought an end to a most incredible experience for me as a special guest of the York County Parks Association. My memories are beyond words to express my appreciation to Tom Brant and those who made this event so pleasurable to me.

I wonder how many people in York County are aware of the fine park system they have available. I think it is the finest.

Written by Roger E. Shaffer
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