Old Frackville Tales

Lorraine Stanton

Mr. Melvin Reed of 334 South Lehigb Avenue was born and raised in Frackville. He told me, “I was born in the house next door and have lived here 43 years and in 49 years this is all I’ve traveled.” He attended the Frackville schools and graduated in 1922. During his high school days he worked as an apprentices barter with Frank Walsh until 1923. He then worked for a short time as a spadee and cutter in the Overall Factory on South Broad Mt. Avenue.

Mr. Reed was 17 years old when he started to work for the Reading Railroad for $6.60 a month. He worked every day of the year from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. for this salary. He was rated as a clerk, but in those days you were a man of all chores and did everything. He sold tickets, delivered telegrams and delivered and picked up bags of mail at the Post Office several times a day. He had to wait for the last train at 7:47 everyday and deliver the mail bags. In a wheelchair to the Post Office which was located at 30 North Lehighton Avenue. The Pennsylvania and Reading Railroads served Frackville at this time. There were 17 passenger trains regularly scheduled each day, nine Reading and eight Pennsylvania. There were also two Reading and two Pennsylvania trains scheduled daily. The Pennsylvania train connected at the Shenandoah Factory on South Broad Mt. Avenue. The Reading trains to Atlantic City and other points were arranged with Frank Walsh until 1935.

In the early twenties the passenger trains came in on the far track and the passengers had to cross the tracks to get to the station. Many times a coal train was on the middle track and the passengers had to wait until this train moved before they could cross. In 1923, the building boom in town, a new brick passenger station, express building, and the foot bridge was built with a shed extended from the bottom of this bridge to the end of the station. Thereafter, the passengers used this bridge to cross the tracks.

“Everything in town came in by train in those days. Ice cream in wooden tubs, cases of milk, coops of chickens and ducks and on Wednesday and Fridays halves of beef wrapped in burlap and barrels of frankfurters. There were no refrigeration cars at this time. The freight cars were either picked up by the receiver or delivered by the company. Several years the United Sunday School Picnics were held at Lakeside Park and a special excursion was run for this day. A box car was reserved for all wash baskets and boxes of lunch from the people attending the picnic. All were individually tagged with the family name.

He remembered some of his co-workers at this time:

Bob Phillips, Passenger Agent; Joe Barry, Telegrapher; Alexander Scott, Night Yardmaster; James Robinson, Day Yardmaster; and Charles Wawser, chief clerk. In addition to Frackville, he also worked in Shenandoah, Pottsville, St. Nicholas and Schuylkill Haven. He worked for the Reading Railroad 48 years and retired in 1971.

During World War I he recalled seeing many trains that passed through town with camouflage cannons on flat cars being transported to Philadelphia on their way to Europe. During World War II he talked about the patriotism of the residents of town when the government called in all rubber products. Families searched barns, garages, cellars and even turned in scrap tires which were used in flower gardens for this war effort. He said he never saw so many tires in his life as he did at that time. He had to tie the tires in groups of four and cut out a quadruple receipt for them. They were then sent to Philadelphia.

Mr. Reed joined the Meredith Band in 1918 and was a member until it disbanded. He played alto, trumpet and baritone instruments and said Frackville had many parades in the old days. They marched on almost every holiday and there was always a big parade on Memorial Day. He recalled playing concerts at all the Lawn Festivals that were held by St. Joseph’s Church annually. In later years he was a member of the American Legion Band, Boys Band sponsored by the Russian Church, Scout Band and the Frackville High School Band from 1935 to 1944.

On November 12, 1943 he was on duty in the Station when Daniel H. Frack came to visit. Mr. Frack was sitting at the telegraph desk and got up to leave when he stumbled over and fell into the arms of Mr. Reed and died.