

DECEMBER 7, 2009 F.A.H.P. NEWS

The Lukes of Delaware and Piedmont, WV: Since later generations of the Luke family are still living in Delaware, I apologize if my information is not 100% correct- some of it is. The patriarch of the family, James L. Luke, of the same generation as my grandfather, Israel Marshall, owned a large and very prosperous paper mill at Piedmont, WV, along the upper reaches of the Potomac River (the town of Luke, MD, right across the river, was named for the family). The Lukes may have lived there before settling in Delaware, but, in any event, they were in the Wilmington area before World War I. The paper-making Marshalls wanted to see the Luke operation at Piedmont, so in the summer of 1910, shortly after purchasing his Model K Stanley, Clarence Marshall, then 25, decided to drive to Piedmont and back over a 3-day weekend. He asked the Delaware Motor Club (later AAA affiliated) for the best route where the roads were acceptable for the 450-mile round-trip journey.

With two passengers in addition to himself in the Model K, the trio headed southwest. I'm not sure of the recommended route, but it was probably through Baltimore and Hagerstown, MD. My father's passengers were most likely Homer Kratz and Earl Barnard. The K has only two bucket seats in front and a single abbreviated bucket in the back, usually referred to as a "mother-in-law" seat. Where they could have carried luggage and tools is a mystery, but adventurous youths could travel light in those days. The K was fast, but the roads would not allow it. Deep ruts and mud slowed down the young voyagers and it took nearly a day and a half to reach Piedmont. As they got ready to leave on Sunday for the return home, something let loose in the engine. It turned out to be a broken wrist pin, but fortunately no other damage occurred. How many 25-year-olds would know what to do in order to drive the car home?

My father understood steam engines. In some way, he blocked the slide valve on center on the broken side, preventing steam from entering that cylinder. They came home, about 225 miles, on one side, or with half the engine working! Geared extremely high (66 to 54) anyway, it may have been somewhat hard to start, but my father said the "bark" of the exhaust was almost deafening with one cylinder doing all the work. All got home on time and went back to work.

Mr. Luke had 3 sons, Joe, Jim (Jr.), and Bill. Jim (1902-1964) became an expert trapshooter and for many years operated a gun club which he called "Lukehurst" on the east side of Concord Pike just north of Talleyville. He and his family lived in the big house on the property. The Delaware State Shoot was held there in 1932 and 1933. The gun club closed after the 1939 season. In the 1960's, the Brandywine Country Club used the home for a clubhouse, and there was a nine-hole (possibly 18-hole) golf course adjoining, which included the old shooting grounds. Most of this property is now a part of the Widener University campus.

Bill Luke, the youngest of the three brothers, established Delaware Olds, Inc., with showroom and shop on Market Street above 13th in Wilmington. In the 1950's, the operation moved to Governor Printz Boulevard and much later the dealership sold Hondas as well as Oldsmobiles. Bill Luke had two low license numbers: Delaware #50 and #100. His brother Jim had #41. Bill's son, Bill, Jr., expanded the business and bought the Mason Chevrolet Company of Kennett Square, selling Chevys and Oldsmobiles at that location on West State Street.

Despite the wet snowfall that prevailed, 85 of us attended Chevonne and Rob Robisons' holiday party Saturday night. As always, it was a very special evening. Chevonne insists on cooking everything herself, in addition to the elaborate Christmas decorations in their beautiful home. Rob had a chance to show off his new Cadillac garage, which was especially popular with the male guests. It has been a very special treat the Robisons have given to FAHP each year to kick off the holidays. Thank you both, very much!

Yesterday, four more candidates were interviewed for the Executive Director position. Following this meeting, the Search Committee narrowed the field to three, whom they will interview for a second time. Notification will be given to all Board members who may want to meet these candidates before a final selection is made. Hopefully, this process will take place within the next 10 days. We've had good candidates, and we are optimistic about picking the best fit for FAHP.

Tomorrow evening, December 8, the Collections Committee will meet at 7:00 to discuss progress on the Rauch & Lang restoration, and determine how fast and to what extent we should move ahead on this. The 607 is coming along well; the windshield frame was separated and the glass removed in preparation for nickel plating. Likewise, the horn has been disassembled for the same purpose. A decision must be made concerning the three gauges and the speedometer head which can use some cosmetic upgrading. We are anxious to get all parts to be plated to the plating shop quite soon. Jim Personti has agreed to start work on the engine for this car before long. This week, we'll make more working room in the garage by moving the Mountain Wagon and the popcorn machine to the Museum for the winter. Jim Sank's big diesel locomotive is being returned to its original condition for potential return to its owner. Jim has it for sale, and we'll be glad to keep it for a reasonable time or until we get a replacement locomotive for which we'll need the space. We are sad for Jim as the accident that permanently injured his back has caused him to give up the plan for his own railroad. Thank you, Jim, for lending us your locomotive with the best of intentions.

Artists who sketched and painted our property have their work on display at the Perfect Cup in Hockessin until the end of December. Interested people are encouraged to visit the Auburn Heights Art Show. All artwork is available for sale.

Most elderly people remember this as Pearl Harbor Day, that "Day of Infamy" in 1941 that began our direct involvement in World War II. However, it is also Delaware Day, the date when Delaware ratified the U.S. Constitution in 1787, beating Pennsylvania and New Jersey by one and two days respectively, to become the first State to do so. When I was in school in the 1930's, we would sing "Our Delaware" (all 3 verses) at Assembly each year. Can any of you recite these verses? Not I, but I remember each verse was dedicated to one of our three counties, New Castle, Kent, and Sussex.

The "News" will probably be a day late next week.

Tom