

MAY 24, 2010 F.A.H.P. NEWS

The old Wilmington Friends School at 4th & West: (Parts of this story were covered in the "News" of 3/16/09). There was a Friends School at this location from 1748 until 1937. My father, his siblings, and cousins on both sides of his family attended here about 1900. I attended the last seven years at 4th and West, before we were moved to the new school in Alapocas. The school I knew was on the east side of West Street between 4th and 5th, with a series of drab brick buildings built over a period of 100 years, attached together to make them look like one. The "new" gym, built about 1918, was along the 5th Street hill, and the large Quaker Meeting House built in 1816 was across West Street, and with its surrounding cemetery, covered a city block.

A ramshackle place, the old school was a place to have fun, especially when its pupils were exploring tunnels that were full of electric wires and were off-limits. These tunnels, running under the school from one end to the other, under West Street to the Meeting House, and from the Meeting House toward the Christina River, had been used to hide and move runaway slaves as a part of the Underground Railroad in the mid-nineteenth century. Some of the school's basement was still in use, however. Girls had cooking classes and an old-fashioned kitchen there, and boys had a shop (the course was called "manual training"). The first floor of the school was at street level, almost, but even here there were a few steps up and down as you went from one end to the other. The ceiling heights varied too, so the second and third floors had even more steps when moving from one end to the other. Two large classrooms toward the rear of the second floor had deep stair-wells with 6 or more steps for access from the adjoining hallway to the floor of the classrooms themselves.

The third and top floor was the most interesting of all. The auditorium was on the 4th Street end of the building above the classrooms of the Lower School. From this auditorium there was an outdoor fire escape on the side toward downtown Wilmington. A great view of the city was afforded from the top landing of this fire escape. Next to the auditorium and up a few steps was the lunch room and cafeteria. What a terrible location for those who had to supply it and remove trash, etc.! On the other side of the lunch room, and almost like a glass-enclosed penthouse was Herschel Loomis' chemistry lab. Since it was not very practical to access this through the lunch room, a second outside fire escape seemed to be the route used by the popular teacher/coach and his students.

There was a small playground with crushed stone surface behind the school for elementary pupils. Skinned knees were the order of the day. Those in the Upper School had to use the Meeting House yard across West Street. A small plot near the corner of 5th and West was used for touch football and served as a softball diamond. A tree served as first base; second was a post in the fence between this plot and the graveyard, and third base a less definitive area on the brick sidewalk close to the Meeting House. The outfield was entirely in the cemetery. For Varsity and JV teams, one of the two ancient school buses (one was a Model A Ford, the other was even older) made the trip after school to Rockford Park, where we practiced and played our home games. If a delinquent student missed the bus, he or she could walk to Delaware Avenue, about six short blocks, and take the trolley to a stop close to the Park. The dressing room was in the basement of the old gym. The fun ended in 1937 when we went to Alapocas in September.

The F.A.H.P. Quarterly Board of Directors meeting was held last Thursday with Steve Bryce officiating. Committee chairs had submitted their reports in advance which saved a lot of time during the meeting. However, some time was spent on the "long form" 990, our annual tax return, which will be effective in 2011. Unlike previous years when the form required mostly financial information, the new and lengthened version will have a lot to do with our Mission Statement and our Strategic Plan, and how they are implemented. As pointed out by our new board member, Dick Franta, this can be an effective fund-raising tool. The summer Board meeting will be held on Thursday, August 5, at 6:30 (changed from August 19).

Steve Bryce made some minor repairs and gave a driving lesson to Dan Citron and Susan Randolph in our Model 78 on Friday. Several of us took this car to Charlie Johnson's shop in Wellsville, PA, today for a complete restoration. Hopefully, it will be completed in the spring of 2011. The several devoted volunteers who have been cleaning and stripping parts from the Model 607 are nearing the end of this phase of the work, and the A-9 auto body shop near Avondale, Keith Ferrence, proprietor, has inspected their work and pronounced it excellent. These parts will be taken, a few at a time, to this shop for priming and painting. The hydraulic brake kit for the 607, supplied by Bob Barrett, was received last week. Locomotive #401 was tested under steam on Thursday and all seemed good.

Jonathan Rickerman, with help from Susan and several volunteers, has made great strides in getting our rack cards distributed, which promote our public "Steamin'" events this year. Our big sign on the front of the property was erected last week. Art Sybell has continued detailed painting on "Little Toot", and was assisted by Rich Green and Andrew of State Parks, for which we thank them. Richard Bernard and Art Sybell, chairs of the June 6 "Steamin' Sunday", still need volunteers to fill certain positions, so please get in touch with one of them or with Susan if you are available to help. The Museum Committee has a lot to do inside the building itself in the next two weeks, but we know they will pull it all together as has been done so many times.

Three Ice Cream Runs have been added to our calendar for the coming months: June 10, June 22, and July 22. These are twilight runs with our cars where we make about a 10-mile trip stopping at Woodside Farm for ice cream. They are a lot of fun and a chance for operator candidates to get some driving time. We like to leave Auburn Heights by 6:30 each evening.

At 7 P.M. on Thursday, May 27, a Volunteer Orientation meeting is being held in the FAHP office. It is important for event volunteers to attend to be brought up-to-date on plans for 2010. If you have questions, please call Anne Cleary, Dan Citron, or Susan Randolph. Those going to the Kennett Square Memorial Day parade on Monday, May 31, need to line up in the large parking lot near West Cypress Street between 9:00 and 9:30. So far, Steve Bryce in the Model 87 and Jerry Lucas in the 76 are the only ones committed. It's not too late to sign up, so if you want to be an operator or a rider, please get in touch with Steve, Anne Cleary, or Susan. Departure from Auburn Heights will probably be about 8:45.

We have a number of surplus items at Auburn Heights. A number of used tires, three or four old computers with monitors, and a new adjustable bed frame are among the things. Get in touch with Susan or with me if you have an interest or know someone who might have. Tom