

FAHP News, October 11, 2010

Epidemics and Quarantines, Early 20th Century: The “flu” epidemic of 1918–19 was one of the worst in U.S. history and in the world. Over ½ million Americans died, and it is thought that between 25 million and 50 million perished worldwide. It came in three waves, the first being detected at a Kansas military base early in 1918. Although American troops spread this to Europe, it was relatively mild and was on the wane by early summer. A second outbreak, a few weeks before the November 11 Armistice ended World War I, was much more severe and was carried by ships to ports all over the world. Where sanitation was almost unknown, such as in India, the death toll was the greatest. The third outbreak was early in 1919, but it was relatively short-lived (perhaps medical authorities had gained knowledge on how to minimize the effects).

My mother and her class of about 20 graduated as nurses at Baltimore’s Union Memorial Hospital in early fall of 1918. They were dispatched on all types of assignments, many to cope with the dreaded influenza. Mary E. Glenn (1892–1976), who was one of my mother’s closest friends for the rest of their lives, was sent on a hospital train to Quincy, Massachusetts, where she worked for many weeks to care for the many infected people of that community. My mother went home to Middletown for a few days before being assigned, but Dorsey W. Lewis, M.D., one of the local family doctors in that community, prevailed upon her to stay and care for the many ill patients as she was the only nurse in Middletown. This she did and nursed many, some of whom passed away, until she finally caught the flu herself. It’s hard to realize how serious this was before the advent of antibiotics during World War II. She lay ill at her mother’s home for many weeks before the fever broke, and she began to regain strength. Knowing how contagious influenza was (and still is, but today it is called a virus), homes with the sick were often under quarantine; that is, a sign would be posted on the door warning potential visitors not to go inside as dangerous germs could infect them.

I remember quarantine signs on the window next to the front door at Auburn Heights when I was down with pneumonia, chicken pox, and measles in 1932–34. The most serious quarantine, however, came in the summer of 1932, when we were at Rehoboth. Sara D. Rodney, age 13, came down with Infantile Paralysis or “Polio,” and all the children about her age and younger for two blocks around were quarantined in their homes. No going out, going to the beach, or playing was permitted. Dr. Bear (possibly Bare) from Baltimore had a summer cottage on Columbia Avenue in the “Pines” of Rehoboth, and he was a specialist on polio. He cared for Sara D. (as she was always called), eventually the quarantine was lifted after 10 days or so, and she recovered with no paralysis. However, it had been a very scary time for her family and the 15 or so kids who were quarantined.

Through the steam car hobby, I first knew Frank Gardner (1920–2004) in 1946, and I considered him a close friend until his death. Early in 1952, Frank, his wife, Eloise “Weezie,” and their three daughters, along with Frank’s brother, contracted polio while at their summer place on Cape Cod. Frank’s brother died within 24 hours. Frank was paralyzed from the waist down. Weezie and the girls recovered, although Weezie has had a weak back from that time to the present. Undaunted, Frank maintained his love for antique cars, had his partially-restored 1912 Stanley completed and equipped with hand controls through the expertise of Calvin

Holmes, and drove this car with gusto and great enjoyment until he sold it to Brent Campbell in 1994. He also enjoyed his several fine gas cars, including Packards and Franklins. We had many great times together. With the perfection of the Salk vaccine in 1955, polio has since been all but forgotten.

Work Nights

On Tuesday evening, Jeff Pollock and Brent McDougall cleaned the locomotives from their October 3 runs, and Bob Jordan and Art Wallace cleaned up the burner from the Model 735. Jerry Lucas and Ted Kamen attempted to re-bend the superheater from this car, but it cracked badly, and the decision was made to make a new superheater. Material for this is expected this week. Steve Bryce replaced balls in the boiler check valves on the Mountain Wagon and re-set the lift. Emil Christofano and Jeff Pollock worked some more on the Rauch & Lang electric.

On Thursday, attendance was down because of "Hershey week," but Jim Personti and Jeff Fallows improved the securing of the crankshaft on the Model K engine, as Chuck Erikson found us several new frame nuts. With the help of Steve Bryce, they also attached the connecting rods and inserted the wrist pins. Bob Stransky began the re-assembly of springs for the Model 607 but needs special carriage bolts that are ordered and should be here by the next work session. Bob Jordan stripped the drag link and other rods from the 607. Mark Russell made a new board to go under the front seat (part of the original was cracked) and screwed everything together for painting. Steve discovered a small fuel leak on the firewall of the Mountain Wagon, which I think has been corrected.

Hershey AACA Fall Meet

While the ever-popular AACA Fall Meet at Hershey began with rain (Bill Schwoebel and Butch Cannard loaded the Model EX amidst light showers and drizzle), it ended with sunshine and high spirits. The Firing Up Demos offered by the Steam Team were well attended, with one gentleman who purchased a Stanley at auction during the event stopping by several times to learn more about his newly acquired prize. Many friends also gathered at the Stanley Museum's closing festivities (our thanks for their great hospitality), where Mike May offered rides in his Model CX.