

APRIL 5, 2010 F.A.H.P. NEWS

Jacob J. Lafferty (1903-1975): The large Lafferty family, Irish-Americans who had been in this area since the mid-19th century, was centered on Kaolin, a tiny community on present-day Route 41 between Hockessin and Avondale. Kaolin was named for the high-quality clay prevalent in the Hockessin Valley, the mining of which produced the largest industry of the 19th century in this area. Kaolin was shipped on the Wilmington & Western R.R. (later the Landenberg Branch of the B & O) from Southwood, Hockessin, and Goldings (Old Wilmington Road) to the potteries of Trenton, NJ, where it was made into high-quality porcelain. Although the last kaolin mined in the area was at Goldings in 1941, several of the deep clay pits, filled with water, are still in evidence. The Stone Mill office complex in Hockessin surrounds one of them which today resembles an attractive small lake.

Jake Lafferty was a friendly comedian born into this large family. At an early age, he married Molly Toomey, and they settled in Yorklyn and raised three sons and two daughters. Jake worked for National Vulcanized Fibre Company and they lived in the “Brick Row”, six double brick houses facing the railroad just west of the fiber mills. The 12 or so families who lived in these company houses had a small community all their own, and most were dismayed when the company tore them down to built its newest mill in 1966. With their children married by that time, Jake and Molly moved into 1/3 of the triple house across from the Marshall Brothers Paper Mill (immediately adjacent to Auburn Heights), and they continued to live there after Jake retired from NVF in 1968 at the age of 65. In retirement he worked for me and the “Magic Age of Steam” from that time until his death in 1975.

Like a lot of Irishmen of his generation, Jake was “comical”. He didn’t have to tell jokes, his stories just came out that way. He stuttered badly at times, as remedies to correct this in children did not exist for poor families when he grew up. He had a good baritone voice, however, and when he sang his favorite Irish ditties at the top of his lungs, there was no stuttering at all- the lyrics came out loud and clear. He polished a lot of brass in the museum, always accompanied by the “Rose of Tralee”, “My Wild Irish Rose”, or one of the several others in his repertoire. A large man with small feet, he could “cut a rug” on the dance floor.

Jake knew everyone in Yorklyn, and filled me in on a lot of things that had happened in years past. He told of the fights inside the old covered bridge between the men who worked at the snuff mill and those from the fiber mill. He also identified several people in old photographs taken by my father just after 1900. The general store in Yorklyn, operated from 1913 until 1976 by Grover C. Gregg, was much like a “company store”, in that Mrs. Gregg ran a bank in the rear of the store on pay days to cash workers’ checks. Almost everyone in Yorklyn had an account at Gregg’s store, and would charge food, and sometimes clothing, against this account. The hope was that the balance would go down to zero on payday, but when the depression hit in the 1930’s, a lot of local people owed for food, for which they couldn’t pay. Gregg made sure they didn’t starve. Jake never forgot this. In the 1960’s and ‘70’s when people were more prosperous and all local residents had cars, supermarkets had selections and prices much more attractive than did Gregg’s Store. Despite this, Jake and Molly always bought most of their food, including their Christmas turkey, from Grover Gregg. They remembered the 1930’s.

Last week, the work sessions continued to produce well, and work is moving along on several fronts. Bill Schwoebel put another layer of insulation over the boiler of the Model K, the boiler was lifted out of the Model 71 for replacement, and cleaning and stripping work continued on the parts from the 607. For fear of omitting the contributions of our MANY talented volunteers, I often refrain from mentioning names, but I must tell you how Jim Personti helps us with his dedication and expertise in many mechanical fields. Just recently, he has rebuilt the electric motors in our standard-gauge twin-motor Lionel electric locomotive 402, has made two new pistons and obtained new rings for our steam locomotive #402 (a coincidence that the numbers are the same), and has re-gauged the driving wheels on the “diesel” locomotive on loan from Jim Sank. Jim Personti’s next major project for us is to rebuild the engine for the Stanley 607, installing Howard Johnson’s “beefing-up” kit. A volunteer “extraordinaire”.

Last Wednesday at a meeting to discuss maintenance around Auburn Heights, James Wagner and Dan Citron introduced us to Rich Green, a Division of Parks employee now at Bellevue, who will be a full-time employee in charge of our buildings and grounds. We are delighted at the prospect of having our property kept in top condition. On Thursday, Steve Bryce, Jerry Novak, Susan Randolph and I went over and approved the proposed changes to the Museum recommended by Dan Citron and his committee, most of which are to be completed by June 6.

On Tuesday, April 6, Bill Schwoebel is chairing an Auburn Valley R.R. Committee meeting in the FAHP office at 7:00. On Thursday, April 8, at the same time and place, an Education Committee meeting is scheduled by Pete Parlett and Richard Bernard, and on Tuesday, April 13, the monthly Events and Scheduling Committee will meet with Anne Cleary as chair.

In just over 3 weeks, most of our cars will go to Winterthur for the annual Point-to-Point event on Sunday, May 2. We have operators for all but two of the steamers in condition to go, and our two Packards are also expected to be driven by Rose Ann Hoover and Jerry Novak. The operators will need to spend some time on the cars going, and in the case of the steamers, fire them up and test them at least once before the event. Unless there is a change, we will have free admission for two people per vehicle we take; i.e., if we take 12 cars, we have 24 free tickets. Only the Mobile, the Rauch & Lang electric, and the Models H-5 and 607 Stanleys are “out of service” this spring. If you are qualified and available, and haven’t committed to go, please let us know so arrangements can be made. Thank you.

Tom