

## F.A.H.P. News, July 22, 2013

**The American Roads Machinery Corporation:** (For more detailed and correct information, I defer to the Bayard Taylor Library or the Chester County Historical Society). South of the railroad and covering the block between Union and Broad Street in Kennett Square was located the American Roads Machinery Corporation, which started manufacturing heavy road and farm equipment in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. One of their well-known products was snow ploughs.

George W. Taft from the Boston area moved to Kennett Square in the 1890s and bought (or built) a large Victorian home on South Broad Street, just up the hill from the company he had acquired. To my knowledge, Taft's family consisted of his wife and one daughter, Clara. He assembled an able staff from the Kennett area to manage, operate, and promote the company and the machinery they manufactured. The sales staff was exceptional, and representatives lived in all parts of the U.S. and Canada, calling on dealers and prospective customers.

Norman Bernard Mancill (1881-1937), in his late 20s, took a job with American Roads, selling snow ploughs and farm machinery in western Canada. After his marriage to Anna H. Marshall at Auburn Heights in January 1912, the newlyweds lived in Calgary, Alberta, for a year or more before coming "back home." Then they lived with Anna's mother, Lizzie, and her bachelor brother, Clarence, for probably three years before moving to Wilmington. Norman left American Roads and had an auto dealership in Wilmington, with some encouragement from his brother-in-law, who was selling Stanley "steamers" at Auburn Heights.

William L. Lang (1870?-1939), a prominent citizen of Kennett, was an official of American Roads for many years. Mary D. "Miss Mame" Lang, for whom a playground and a school in Kennett were named, was his sister. William D. Polk (1880?-1960?), who lived in an old home on the north side of West Sickles Street with his wife, Ann Taylor Polk, was sales manager in the late 1930s and 1940s, prior to his retirement. Mr. Polk, traveling for his company in south central Pennsylvania, stopped to visit with me when I was attending Mercersburg Academy.

About 1930, the company changed its name to Good Roads Machinery Corporation and expanded its line to include tractors and other off-road vehicles. It fell on hard times by 1960, the plant was closed, and much later it was remodeled and occupied by the Clark Shoe Company, a British corporation. Other uses have been found for the property and buildings today.

Clara Taft married Ulysses Grant Gifford, a country doctor in Kennett for 60 years. They occupied the old Taft home on South Broad Street, and Dr. Gifford had his office in part of the first floor (as did Kennett's other physicians McKinstry, Reynolds, Chapell, and Bellis). At least once a year they would travel by train to Boston, as Clara must have had numerous relatives there. On one such trip, I met them at one of Boston's hotels when I was attending M.I.T. in 1942. My mother worked with Clara Gifford for many years when both were active in the Kennett New Century Club. The old Taft-Gifford home fell into disrepair after Clara's death about 1980, and the yard was overgrown in recent years. However, it appears that new owners are fixing it up again, possibly for offices. It features Victorian architecture at its best.

**Work Report:** On Tuesday, July 16, 17 volunteers were on hand, as follows: Steve Bryce (in charge), Ted Kamen, Bob Jordan, Dennis Dragon, Emil Christofano, Tim Ward, Jerry Novak, Jeff Pollock, Lou

Mandich, Greg Landrey, Susan Randolph, Mark Hopkins, Ken Ricketts, Robert Hopkins, Mark Russell, Art Wallace, and Brent McDougall.

The team of Landrey, Randolph, Novak, and M. Hopkins began cataloguing the items stored in the tonneau of the Model 750 when it arrived at Auburn Heights, and large storage boxes were provided for properly caring for the parts related to this car. From our recent weekend tour, the boilers of the Models 87 and 735 were filled (the other four boilers on the tour had siphoned full), and tops were lowered on three of the cars (the entire tour was run with tops up). The wiring to the electric fuel pump on the '37 Packard was corrected, and the motor then started easily. The brakes on this car still need to be tested on the road.

The right fenders and the running board are securely mounted on the Model 607, and work is progressing on those on the left side. Two new banjo bolts were made for the pilot on the Model 740. Repair work on the parquet floor of our model stationary steam engine has been completed by Mark Russell, who also fashioned doors for a now refurbished storage piece (Susan is especially appreciative of his woodworking skills!). The cars were partially cleaned from the previous weekend's tour, but several of the cars cannot be thoroughly washed as the museum was leased to the Science Explorers for 5 days during the week. Ken Ricketts worked on the electric trains.

On Thursday, July 18, nine volunteers attended the regular work session, after three others, Bill Schwoebel, Mike Leister, and Linda Herman, had worked on track repair during the middle of a very hot day. Those on hand in the evening were Dan Citron, Devon Hall, Bob Stransky, Art Wallace, Ted Kamen, Bob Jordan, Richard Bernard, Mark Russell, and Tom Marshall (in charge). The top was put up on the Model 725, and packings and oil leaks were checked on the 735. The vaporizer cable was pulled on the 740, and the fuel system appears to be clean.

Work progressed on the left side of the Model 607, the fenders are mounted, and the running board is ready to be attached. Since the originals were not found, new bolts were made to attach the fenders to their brackets. The boiler check was removed from the Model 71, in order to ascertain that the feed line into the boiler is clear. Also on this car, insulation that had fallen off the hood flap (from the heavy rain) was replaced. The contacts were cleaned, and one was tightened, on the elevator in the carriage house.

On Saturday, Bill Schwoebel, Brent McDougall, Anne Cleary and Robert Hopkins did some track refinements prior to testing Locomotive 401 and its train of red passenger cars, running counter-clockwise around the A.V.R.R. loop. They are pleased with the result.

Jerry Novak is in charge of the work session next Tuesday, July 23, and on July 25 there will be our second Ice Cream Run of the season (please let Susan know if you are interested in going), so the work session will be limited to those who want to work on a project in progress with no direction from above. We are pleased to report that Dave Leon is feeling much better, but his doctor has warned him to take it easy for a while. Good luck, Dave. We miss you.