

## NOVEMBER 16, 2009 WEEKLY NEWS

**The Trucks at Auburn Heights:** In the late 1920's when I was very small, my father had a Model T Ford touring car of about 1925 for a "hired man" to drive when he went for the mail twice a day and to Cousin Albert Marshall's farm to exchange our milk cans. Sometimes this was "Bate" Dennis, whose full-time job was at the paper mill; sometimes it was teen-ager William Johnson, member of a large Hockessin family. One evening "Bate" left the "T" at the kitchen door to deliver the milk inside; when he came out, the car was resting against a tree just above the mill race. I think it cost \$5 for a new fender. There was also a Graham Brothers truck, built on a 4-cylinder Dodge chassis of 1926 with a starter-generator and 12-volt system. In brass letters on each side of the panel-bodied truck body (with heavy wire mesh like a mail truck of that period) the weights were indicated: 3750, 2250, 6000 (light weight, tare, and gross). It seemed it was used only when we moved to Rehoboth in early summer and home again in the fall. I have never driven another car or truck that steered as hard as that one.

In 1929, my father bought a slightly-used '29 Ford Model A Station Wagon. In the early '70's these became known as "woodies". It had side curtains and two removable seats behind the front seat. It was used by Clifford Murray and others as a pick-up truck; the seats were never in the car. I learned to drive in this station wagon, beginning on the grounds of Auburn Heights when I was eight (1932). It served us well, even with my practicing, until my father sold it in 1936 to make way for more modern things.

In February '36 he bought a 6-cylinder Chevrolet light truck chassis for \$409, and sent it to York, PA, to have a station wagon body without rear seats installed for \$230. This station wagon had wind-up glass windows instead of side curtains, but it was used as a pick up truck in the same way as the Model A Ford. It never seemed to have much power, and during World War II gasoline rationing when someone at the mill needed transportation, it left Auburn Heights about 1944. In 1937, we had acquired a '31 Packard Standard Eight sedan from Sara Bowers and her mother as a "school car", one in which "Cliffey" could take and pick up my cousin Eleanor and me to and from school in Wilmington. My father had plans for that car.

At the end of the war, the '31 Packard was converted into a pick-up truck with a dump body. The sedan body was cut away and made into a close-coupled coupe configuration, with the open dump body behind. Although the weight distribution was too far to the rear and the dump feature never worked, it provided a solid pick-up truck for several years with the lettering "Yorklyn Gun Club" on each door. In 1954, my father bought a new Dodge ½-ton pick-up from his friend Bob Ferguson in Kennett Square for \$1,400. We used this little truck very hard, as I carried rail, switch parts, and the like for the beginning of the Wilmington & Western R.R. in the mid-1960's. In 1967, I bought a small Chevrolet El Camino pick-up, which was a dandy little 6-cylinder car, but not heavy enough to do all that was required. At the end of 1968, I traded it for a new '69 Chevy Longhorn ¾-ton pick-up with V-8 engine, which was also used hard, and more miles (about 90,000) were put on this pick-up truck than any others at Auburn Heights before it was sold in 1987. I drove it to the locomotive plant of GE at Erie, PA, to pick up two air reservoirs for Wilmington & Western Locomotive #92, to Wisconsin Dells, WI, to

pick up the steam paddle-wheel engine for the river boat in our pond, as well as to Latrobe, PA, to take delivery of two steel tires for Locomotive #98 on the W & W.

In 1983, I bought a heavy-duty Ford F-250 with 4-speed manual transmission and 460 cu. in. V-8 engine for towing my new closed trailer. I sold this to Jim Keith in 1987 after buying my first Suburban for towing, a 1985 GMC. Finally, in 1987 I bought a new Ford F-150 ½-ton pick-up with no frills for \$9,000. This truck has been driven 1,000 miles per year for 22 years, and was sold to the Friends of Auburn Heights Preserve that soon is donating it to the State of Delaware.

There is a lot of “News” this week. The grand plan described last week for the former NVF property is inching closer to fruition, and another descriptive newspaper article, this time in the Hockessin/Greenville Community News, has appeared. Two candidates were interviewed for the Executive Director position, with several more to be scheduled for this week and next. The burner is ready to be installed on our Model 740, and the boiler was lifted out of the Model K with the hope of swaging the tubes to make them tight. This past weekend, we cooperated with the Craft Fair at CCArts in Yorklyn, had our Model 76 outside the CCArts building on Saturday and Sunday, and accepted visitors to the Steam Car Museum at Auburn Heights. Numerically it was not successful but we made many new friends and found interested people who said they want to come to one of our “steamin’” events.

The Finance Committee is meeting tonight with our treasurer, Bob Reilly, on a conference call, to establish a budget to be presented to the full Board of Directors at Thursday night’s quarterly meeting. The Collections Committee will meet tomorrow night, also prior to the Board meeting.

Jonathan Rickerman, new chair of the Publicity Committee, has taken very seriously the promotion of our Steamin’ Events, November 27 and 28, and has charged all our active volunteers with distributing rack cards and posters to places where they will do the most good. All distributions are to be recorded to give us a feel for where these advertising materials are welcomed. This is a major step forward. The office has sent out a press release to many local papers and radio stations. Yesterday we were interviewed and photographed by the News Journal, and a nice story by Ed Kenney appeared on the second page of the local section today.

We are slightly short on volunteers to cover all jobs on November 27 and 28. If you can volunteer and have not yet done so, please contact the office 239-2385 or E-mail us at [admin@auburnheights.org](mailto:admin@auburnheights.org). Dan Citron has also asked that the house docents come by 12 noon if possible, as he would like to fill in each of you on the latest developments regarding the State’s role in acquiring the NVF properties, as you can expect questions about this subject.

We are sorry to report that Rob Robison’s mother suffered TWO falls during the past week, breaking bones in her leg each time. She is in the hospital near Harrisburg and Rob and Chevonne are spending much time there. We send our sincere regards, and hope things make a turn for the better soon.

Tom

