F.A.H.P. News, December 16, 2013

Mercury-Vapor Heat Lamps, 1930s: Contagious childhood diseases were prevalent when I was in elementary school in the early 1930s. Someone in the class would come down with chicken pox or measles, and in a few days more than half the class would be sick in bed at home. In a week or so it would run its course, and all would be back together awaiting the next epidemic. In short, before the availability of antibiotics such as Sulfanilamide or Penicillin, a common cold, if not properly treated, could easily turn into the dreaded pneumonia.

Changeable weather in the winter months was always the time when these infections (now called viruses) would strike. Parents and country doctors thought up many ways to try to contain these childhood diseases. Sunshine was considered good, although it was scarce in the Mid-Atlantic states, and orange juice and other citrus fruit were supposed to contain "sunshine." An apple a day may have kept the doctor away, in some cases.

To further compensate for the lack of sunshine, use of heat lamps of various types were supposed to replicate lying in the sun. Not many families had heat lamps, but my parents bought a mercury-vapor heat lamp and installed it in one of the third-floor bedrooms at Auburn Heights. It was a temperamental gadget that could only be started by gently agitating a chain that was attached to a delicate glass bulb, which would eventually light up and hum to indicate it was ready for use. One dare not look directly at the bulb once it was lit, and special dark glasses had to be worn before lying under the lamp for 15 minutes or so at one time.

For a couple of winters, when the idea was new, the Mancill twins would be brought by their mother after school about twice a week for a "sunlamp treatment," at which time I would join them. With our mothers keeping us under control, two of the three of us could play and "cut up" on the third floor while the third was under the lamp. This was great fun for me, as normally I could not expect anyone my age to play with after returning from school. A slight tan may have resulted from exposure to the "sun lamp," but it is doubtful that there were other lasting results.

I can recall my mother lying under the lamp on a few occasions, but she was usually too busy. As time went on, it was used less and less, and eventually it found storage in the basement. It was probably scrapped during World War II.

Successors to the sun lamp were 1) a battery machine that sent low-voltage current through the victim's system when holding a chrome-plated handle in each hand, achieving a tingling sensation, supposedly to improve circulation; and 2) a short-wave Diathermy machine containing two pads. Lying on one pad with the other on the chest, it was supposed to work like a microwave and create current through the body, also to improve circulation. Naturally, both had to be used with caution. My father was never much for these machines, but somehow, my mother and I survived their use. Antibiotics changed everything.

Work Report: The work session for Tuesday evening, December 10, was canceled because of inclement weather. On Thursday, December 12, the following 10 volunteers were on hand

despite the continuing wintry weather: Steve Bryce (in charge), Bob Jordan, Ted Kamen, Mark Russell, Gerhard Maute, Eugene Maute, Jim Personti, Geoff Fallows, Dave Leon, and Tom Marshall.

The pilot was reinstalled in the Model 735, after a thorough cleaning, both the vaporizer and the slots in the casting. On the Model 607, it was cleaned and a few places touched up, and the relocation of the three-tube indicator was tested and approved. The vaporizer for the Model 740 is finished, with its new configuration of 6½ feet in the firebox. All has been fitted in place, and the bracket holding the burner forks has been reinforced. There is still a "moving block" of carbon in the vaporizer coil, which will be addressed before the burner is ready to go back on the car.

Progressing on the new burner for our Model K, the mixing-tube holes were cut out at the front of the outside pan, and insulation now lines the pan's bottom. The new-old-stock pan was reconfigured by outside contract to conform to the bottom of the three-tube burner grate. Careful measurement indicates that the pan is about 1" too deep, and since a 1" strip had been added to make it right for a later 30-H.P. burner, removal of this strip should make it just right. Work continues to make the configuration of the vaporizer tubes exactly right. More photos were catalogued and captioned in our "library."

The burner in the garage and shop failed, and Howard McKean put several electric heaters around to hold the temperature well above freezing for the night. (The burner was fixed the next morning, a faulty igniter being the problem.)

A lot of work in the museum was done this past week by Susan and Jesse in preparation for the special children's holiday events on Wednesday night and Saturday afternoon. Volunteers Steve Bryce and Jerry Novak also spent a lot of time with decorations, signage, parking plans, etc. It was a Herculean effort, and while the attendance was low on Wednesday, Saturday turned out to be well attended and enjoyed, making everything extremely worthwhile. About 12 volunteers helped at each event.

Next Tuesday, December 17, the last work session before the holidays will take place, and little work is expected. This is the night of the annual volunteers' appreciation party with the indomitable Rose Ann Hoover and her chocolate offerings taking place in the museum about 7 P.M.