

October 16, 2006

Hello, Steam Team:

Last week the story was about the building of the shop. Here is another shop story from 1937: I was 13 that year and had been begging my father for a Model T Ford that I could run in the meadow and around the fields near Auburn Heights. The going price for "T's" was from \$5 to \$25 in those days, with \$15 being the average. Naturally these were usually late model T's built in the 1920's. I thought there was a 50-50 chance that he might get me one.

One day in November that year I came home from school and he said, "Go out in the shop, there is a surprise there". I felt sure my dream had come true. As I entered I saw instead a large new car, which took up most of the space. He had bought himself the '37 Packard Twelve still in our collection. While I was always excited about the arrival of a new Packard, this excitement was tempered indeed, as I realized I was never going to have my Model T. I learned later that my father's old friend, Jake Noznesky of Kennett Square, a long-time Model T operator, had recommended against it, fearing I would get into trouble. Two very wise men of an earlier generation probably made a sound decision but I was disappointed. (Lou Mandich, a FAHP member, is in possession of Jake's old Model T truck, in which "Jake the junk man" collected scrap metal in this part of the country for many years).

My father was proud of the fact that he got a very good price on the Packard. He said it listed for \$5,100, which is higher than any of the Packard books tell us, but possibly it did with radio, heater, defroster, chrome wheel rings, and "sidemount" spares with tire covers and mirrors, all of which were on this Packard. With his dealer discount and year-end close out of the '37 models, he said he paid \$2,600. Actually, he had bought a '38 Super Eight Club Sedan in October, '37, and this 13-year-old liked the '38 styling better with the "broad-shouldered look" of the higher front fenders and new dash treatment. However, my father liked the '37, and indeed it was a better car and the last year of 144" wheelbase on the largest models.

When I grew up, we always had a "big car" for trips which was not used on a daily basis. My first recollection was a 1924 First Series Straight Eight, 7-passenger touring car. This was a fine car, the first Packard with 4-wheel brakes, and was used all summer starting in 1925, for trips to and from Rehoboth Beach. Next came a 1928 Model 543 Straight Eight 7-passenger closed sedan, in which my parents, my mother's sister, and I went all around Florida early in '28. The first 3 months of 1932, my parents rented a small house in Southern Pines, NC, and my dad drove this car the 460 miles from Yorklyn in one day (less than 13 hours). After a month there, Joe Stoeckle, who worked for the Packard agency in Wilmington, drove a new '32 Big Eight

7-passenger sedan from Wilmington to Southern Pines, delivering the new car and returning with the old one. He left Southern Pines at 6 A.M., and arrived in Wilmington at 4:15 the same day, running 60 m.p.h. most of the time. This big '28 Packard was hard to sell as a used car, and sat in the Wilmington agency for several months with a price tag of \$450. I liked the '32, but it was never one of my father's favorites. In late summer of 1934, we went in it to the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago, and returned via Detroit. My dad had his eye on a Twelve 7-passenger limousine (which had a divider window and black leather in front). He wanted a '34 left-over model, as the styling had changed drastically on the '35 models which had a rounded appearance and most of the chrome removed. At the Packard factory, they showed him 6 or 8 cars of the description he wanted, he picked one, and drove it home. Joe Stoeckle was along on this trip as well, and he followed in the "old" '32, which was sold to a used car dealer in Philadelphia soon after our return. We went on a six-week trip to Nova Scotia and the Gaspé Peninsula in the '34 Twelve in the summer of 1936. The roads were dusty and rough and this was the car that was dropped onto the deck of a ferry boat in the Minas Basin at the head of the Bay of Fundy. Nevertheless, I loved the car, and was sorry (at the time) to have it replaced by our present '37, which turned out to be the last of our "big cars", but not the last of our Packards.

The "Little Toot" crew had a set-back when the latex paint wouldn't dry, and they called on a Shinn's representative to tell them what was wrong. He diagnosed the problem correctly and Ron and Art removed the tacky paint with a power washer, then dried it thoroughly with a tent and salamander. The second time, the color went on the locomotive perfectly, and it is a thing of beauty. There will not be time to paint the cars before October 21-22, but when completed next spring, we will have the best wooden train in the country! Steve Jensen did some minor track work and has pronounced the track and locomotives ready to go for next weekend. The four popcorn makers from October 8 had a successful day, estimating that they made and sold in excess of 200 bags of popcorn at the DNS Harvest Festival. Three of our Stanleys with Anne Cleary, Bill Schwoebel, Butch Cannard and Jerry Lucas in control made the 50-mile round-trip to the HCCP Fall Meet near Media on October 15 without major incident. The cars used were the Models H-5, 78, and 607.

We are shifting into high gear for our public event this weekend. Ruth's niece and grand-niece donated a good supply of pumpkins and her great-nephew gave us some bales of straw. Chevonne and Rob Robison have provided a large supply of colorful 'mums. Although it is optional, Anne Cleary is asking that volunteers working on 10/21 and 22 wear something symbolic of Halloween. This will not apply to the house docents. Ruth, Chevonne Robison, and Jan Rivera are busy tidying and decorating the house. If you can work this weekend and have not signed up, please get in touch with Rob Robison, chairman of the event, or Bob Reilly.

Finally, last week's "News" mentioned a house tour tomorrow night (Tuesday, 10/17) for those volunteers and their families who would like to see it (at 7:00 and 7:30). The weather forecast is not favorable. If you would like to come, please call us right after 4:00 P.M., and we will have made the decision as to whether it is "go" or whether it will be postponed. Please call Ruth at 239-7645, or our office at 239-2385. We hope you read this! Many thanks. Tom