

MAY 25, 2009 F.A.H.P. NEWS

Memorial Day at Mercersburg: I have always liked Memorial Day, or as some old folks called it “Decoration Day”. There are two main reasons it is a favorite holiday: I like what it stands for, and it signifies the unofficial beginning of summer. When I was growing up, we always put up the huge 48-star flag on our 108’-high flag pole in the front lawn of Auburn Heights (taken down in the early 1980’s), and after I started driving, I would take my mother to Union Hill Cemetery (Kennett Square), Hockessin Friends Burial Ground, or Old Drawyers near Odessa where she would put flowers on graves of family members.

My first experience with the community cemetery at Mercersburg (PA) was in 1942, a few days before I was graduated from Mercersburg Academy. On May 30 the entire student body joined local residents of Mercersburg in a quiet service to celebrate Memorial Day. It was a beautiful morning, and in the midst of the dreaded final exams, provided the perfect period of reflection on what had been and what was about to come. We had been in World War II for six months.

Forty years after that, I read a wonderful story that related to the cemetery at Mercersburg. Just before 1900 a young man named Archibald Rutledge from McClellanville, SC, was hired to teach English at the Academy by Dr. William Mann Irvine, founder (1893) and headmaster of the boy’s boarding school. Rutledge was a legend in his own time; he had retired as head of the English Department a year or two before I became a student in 1941, but he was still mentioned frequently, and always with great esteem and admiration. A few years after his first arrival at Mercersburg, he had married Dr. Irvine’s daughter, which didn’t hurt, either.

Right after 1900, Rutledge was wandering around the cemetery near his new home, when he came across three or more Confederate graves. He knew the occupants had been killed in one of the several skirmishes that occurred north of the Mason-Dixon Line in the days leading up to the Battle of Gettysburg. He decided that he would try to find family survivors of the brave young men who lost their lives in 1863. Returning to South Carolina nearly every summer, exhaustive research turned up the widows of three of the men whose graves he discovered. None of the widows, then becoming elderly, had known what happened to their young husbands- all they knew was that they didn’t come home. Rutledge arranged for them to come to Mercersburg to visit the graves.

It was uncertain what sort of reception they would receive from the “Yankees” in Pennsylvania. There was one train a day into Mercersburg, and the day they were to arrive, Archibald Rutledge (and many others) prepared to meet them and make them feel at home. Memorial Day was not celebrated in the south, and the widows must have feared the reception they might receive. When the train pulled in, however, the whole town turned out, and the southern ladies were real heroes during their stay in Mercersburg. They were forever grateful to Archibald Rutledge for finding their deceased husbands and making possible the memorable visit. I’m sorry I never met the “legend in his own time”.

Carl S. Amsley (1921-1998), known to most of us who have owned steam cars, is buried in the community cemetery at Mercersburg, the town where he was born.

This week Dan Citron has a group of docents from Rockwood visiting Auburn Heights, and although the emphasis will be on the big house, they will tour the Museum as well. Today, 5 Stanleys and our '32 Packard took part in the Memorial Day parade in Kennett Square, driven by Richard Bernard (Model 78), Butch Cannard (Model 87), Bill Schwoebel (Model K), Dan Citron (Model 735), Steve Bryce (Model 76), and Jerry Novak (Model 905 Packard). The Museum exhibits and new photos are progressing well, and we hope to have most in place for our first "Steamin' Sunday" on June 7.

Jim Personti finished the rebuilding of our Cretors popcorn engine, John McCoy of the Hagley Museum and Jerry Novak have successfully installed the turntable ring on its concrete base, and the wooden stand for the "hands on" Stanley engine exhibit is just about finished except for painting. Improvements to the grounds by the Bellevue State Parks staff are starting to show, especially near the railroad trestle. Our big promotional and informational sign was erected for the season on the front of the property. On Friday, Dean Paris and two others from his organization in Takoma Park, MD, visited and will make a proposal for upgrading our Museum. The spring edition of the "Auburn Heights Herald" was off the press last week and available in time for our Board of Directors meeting on May 21. Copies are in the mail to all members who don't pick them up on work nights. Thanks to Bob Reilly for substituting for Rob Robison as Editor for this issue.

At the Board meeting last Thursday, the Code of Ethics for FAHP was passed unanimously, after thorough discussion, having been revised by Greg Landrey and the Collections Committee. President Steve Bryce was also happy to report that the "Friends" agreement with the State of Delaware (Division of Parks and Recreation) has been signed and is finally behind us. He and Jerry Novak worked long on this with their counterparts Chazz Salkin, Matt Chesser and Paul Nicholson. Bob Reilly agreed to take responsibility of preparing our tax return, IRS Form 990.

The week beginning June 1 will be a busy one. On Tuesday, 6/2, several of us hope to take Stanleys to Freedom Village near Coatesville for their late spring festival, on the invitation of Jane Cannard, a resident of this retirement community. It is a nice 40-mile round-trip drive through beautiful Chester County, so we are hoping for good weather. On June 4, WHYY Channel 12 (public television) hopes to film a segment at Auburn Heights during the early afternoon, and we will try to simulate one of our public days with lots of people and most of our steam things running, including two trains. We have the Children's First Pre-School from Hockessin coming, with teachers and parents, and we still need volunteers to handle all the necessary jobs. It will be free to our visitors, as we need people to make it look as active as possible (the WHYY camera crew does not work on weekends, when they could film the real thing). Please get in touch with Catherine Coin if you can help that day. And then will come JUNE 7, the first "Steamin' Sunday" of 2009, with house tours available along with our usual things. A busy week, indeed!

Tom