

December 3, 2007

Hello, Steam Team: **Remember Pearl Harbor:** Next Friday will be December 7, the 220th anniversary of Delaware's ratification of the U.S. Constitution, officially making it the First State or the "State that started a Nation". 66 years ago, however, it was a "date that will live in infamy", when the U. S. Pacific Fleet was wiped out by the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. People my age could always remember where they were on that day which changed their lives.

I was included, along with eleven other students and three teachers, in a weekend trip to Washington, Richmond, and Williamsburg, sponsored by the history department at Mercersburg Academy. Leaving Mercersburg early Saturday morning, December 6, we first stopped in the Nation's capital, where we visited the Library of Congress and the brand new National Airport across the Potomac. Later in the afternoon we had tours of Virginia's capitol building designed by Thomas Jefferson, and the church where Patrick Henry gave his stirring "Give me Liberty or give me Death!" speech. Finally, we bedded down in one of the houses operated by Colonial Williamsburg, a short distance from Duke of Gloucester Street and the College of William and Mary.

Sunday morning we toured the several important buildings open to the public after their authentic reconstruction only a few years before. These included the House of Burgesses, the Raleigh Tavern, the George Wythe House, and the Governor's Palace, in addition to the Christopher Wren Building (1693) on the William and Mary campus. After a light lunch, the 3 cars (owned by 3 teachers, respectively) stopped for gas on the old Richmond Road just east of Williamsburg, before heading back to Washington and Mercersburg. It was about 2 P.M. and the radio was on in the filling station. News was coming through that the Japanese had bombed the U. S. Naval Base at Pearl Harbor in the Territory of Hawaii, where most of the Pacific Fleet was anchored. That would have been about 8:30 A.M. Hawaii Time (if I'm correct, Hawaii was 2-1/2 hours behind the West Coast in those days), so the attack was barely over. No one in this area knew the extent of damage at that point.

We reached Washington just after dark, and stopped for dinner at a restaurant that resembled an old stable. In passing the government buildings, it was a strange sight to see them guarded by military men. On our way out of town, we went past the Japanese Embassy, which was also well-guarded, but dark inside. We reached Mercersburg by 10:30 or so, and went to bed in our dormitories. That was the end of December 7, 1941, in the Eastern Time Zone.

On Monday morning, we learned what had really happened and heard an early assessment of the damage. President Roosevelt addressed a joint session of Congress, and gave his "Day of Infamy" speech, after which Congress declared war on Japan. Within a day or two, war had also been declared against Hitler's Germany. A cloud hung over the Christmas season in 1941. "Remember Pearl Harbor" became a marching and rallying song for the rest of World War II. Our Pre-Meteorology unit at Brown University sang it almost daily as we marched all over Providence in 1943.

Two evening work sessions, as well as a 4-hour Saturday session, accomplished a number of projects. The locomotive “engine house” (basement of the shop) was thoroughly cleaned as were its engines, and on Saturday, the two existing tracks were moved over and the locomotives turned. This is a temporary alignment, but it gives us a good idea of how we can build three serviceable tracks in that area, the new one to accommodate our “Diesel” locomotive when it arrives. A supporting post was moved about one foot to allow better alignment for the third track, yet to be built. The burner from the Model 735 is completely apart for installation of a new inside burner pan and mixing tubes before the new outside pan is utilized to finish the job. It is our goal to have this burner, plus the new one for the Model CX, finished and installed before we break for the holidays. The superheater on the 735 also needs some attention.

The big sign in front of Auburn Heights is stored for the winter and the doors are on the tunnel. Water pipes are drained and blown out in unheated areas, and the locomotive boilers were washed again and left dry in the event these engines may need to spend a few days outdoors during final building of the new basement tracks. A new dry valve is necessarily being installed (we hope within a few days) on the sprinkler system in the Museum. Fire Protection Industries, which will do the work, will test everything after installation. In the meantime, we still have fire protection, but not freezing protection, as the system has filled with water forcing out much of the compressed air.

We welcome Mark Russell as a new volunteer, and hope he is able to join us often. This week, the Events Committee meets on Tuesday, December 4, at 7:30, and the Executive Committee on Thursday, December 6, at 7:00, both in the front hall at Auburn Heights. The latter meeting is to interview the leading candidate for Executive Director. Keep tuned for news on this which should be forthcoming shortly. Bob Reilly met yesterday with Cam Yorkston, who has been hired to assist with our Strategic Plan, and it is hoped that the committee will be formed and start functioning very soon. George Contant, period furnishings expert with the State, expects to be here on December 12, to become acquainted with the furnishings of Auburn Heights.

All of us wish John McNamara a quick recovery from the broken bones in his foot, suffered at one of the tunnel portals when he was running Locomotive #401. He has a cast up to his knee that will remain until after Christmas, and he is in considerable discomfort. Get better soon, John, we miss you! The fall edition of the “Herald” is off the press and you should have it soon. Rob Robison, Bob Reilly, Mike May, and Bill Schwoebel work hard to make this a quarterly publication of which we can be proud, and we thank them for their exemplary efforts. Rob and Chevonne Robison tell us they have had nearly 80 acceptances for their Holiday Party next Saturday evening, December 8. This is the third annual party they have had for the *Friends of Auburn Heights Preserve*, and all members have been invited. In advance, thank you, Chevonne and Rob, for this wonderful gesture and for all you do for FAHP. We hope to see you there!

Tom