

September 26, 2005

Hello, Steam Team:

In thinking of steam car trips of the past, I want you to know J. Homer Kratz (1881-1956), who is pictured at Bedford Springs with my father, Earle Eckel, and Augustus Post in the mural that hangs in our Museum. Homer's expression was dead-pan, I never saw him laugh, but he enjoyed his bachelor life, and during the last 10 years of it he made many Stanley trips with my father, often in the Mountain Wagon or in the Model 87. About 1904, Homer was hired by the new National Fibre and Insulation Co. as accountant and bookkeeper. His office was in the #1 Mill, just across from the R.R. station in Yorklyn. He rented a room from the Walter sisters in Kennett Square, and usually boarded with them as well. He commuted daily to Yorklyn by trolley. When my father, then a bachelor also, became a Stanley dealer in 1910, Homer made a few trips with him and thought he wanted a Stanley. Another bachelor and fibre mill manager, Samuel E. Cooper, had the same thing in mind, so he and Homer bought a slightly used Model 72 together (1911-12 roadster, 20-H.P.). 40 years later Homer was telling us about his experiences with this car, which he called the "hair-pin raiser". Curious as to what he meant, he elaborated to us that he had a girl friend who had a head full of hair-pins. One day he took her for a fast spin, and the hair-pins started to fly out and were lost behind. Unfortunately, the partnership of Homer Kratz and Sam Cooper lasted only about a year, and I think Cooper bought out Homer's interest. Neither one was mechanically inclined, and the car was here frequently for repairs, as evidenced by my father's book of accounts.

When Homer retired from National Vulcanized Fibre at the end of 1947 (it was not called NVF until 1965), he was ready to travel. My mother never enjoyed long trips in the open cars, so my father was glad to have a companion, and he usually invited Homer. He went to Steam Car Tours in 1948, 1949, 1955, and 1956, and on the Glidden Tour every year from 1948 through 1953. He also attended many of the spring and fall meets of AACA. He looked slightly like my father, and many thought they were brothers. They got along well. When the Stanley would stop for water, my father would attend to mechanical things and Homer would entertain the crowd. About 75% of what he said was correct. When the watering up was completed, Homer would still be engaged in conversation, and my father would pull away, as if he were leaving Homer behind. He would pull around the corner and stop, and Homer would come puffing and climb aboard. Then they would travel for miles without a word being said. They shared a room at overnight stops, and Homer snored. My father would grab spare pillows and start throwing them at Homer until he awoke, and they'd have another "go" at a night's sleep. In his retirement, Homer also enjoyed golf. He played one afternoon in early December, 1956, suffered a heart attack, and died two hours later in his landlady's home in Kennett Square.

On a beautiful day yesterday, we had our September "Steamin' Sunday" with no mechanical problems and some very happy visitors. Our attendance figures were very disappointing, however, as we sold only 119 adult and 67 child tickets, for a total of 186, plus 9 complimentary. The gift shop grossed \$247. Although we were concerned about volunteers, we had 28 working, and our thanks and congratulations go to all who participated. Our theme was "Music in the Air", and we thank Rose Ann Hoover and her committee for having Dulcimer players, a female quartet, Paul Harris and his hurdy-gurdy, and our own rebuilt orchestrion. Susan Davis, president and CEO of the Stanley Museum (Kingfield, ME) and an advisor to FAHP, was our guest, but we put her to work sweeping up and preparing to open our grounds at 1:00 P.M. Had we had fewer volunteers, we would have found a more meaningful job for her during the afternoon.

Since it's nearly 5 weeks until our October Sunday event, we can turn our attention to other important things. Bill Schwoebel has called a meeting of the Management Group chairs for tomorrow, Tuesday, Sept. 27, at 7:30 in the Reception Room of the Museum. I know a lot of things are on his agenda. We know all who chair one of the sub-committees will want to attend. For our work sessions, the locomotives need to be cleaned up after their Sunday run, work on the wheels from the Model 735 (Dale Simpkins) can be continued, and other ongoing mechanical projects can be completed. Hopefully, the R.R. signal project can move ahead, and the remaining track sections behind the snack bar building can be built and installed.

The week beginning October 3 is "Hershey Week" for many of you.

On Saturday, October 8, I've been asked to have one of our Packards at Winterthur for a special event there, and I'll be glad to do this unless someone else wants to do it. On Saturday, October 15, we've been asked to have at least one Stanley at Newtown Square for the dedication of the old freight station as a steam-era museum. And on Sunday, Oct. 16th, the Annual Fall Meet of the Historical Car Club of Pennsylvania takes place at the Delaware County Community College near Media, PA. It's not as busy as May, but there is still much going on.

Finally,. a report on our charter member and long-time friend, Bill Rule. For those who don't know, Bill was broadsided on his motorcycle last Friday morning, and his hip badly mutilated. He was rushed to Christiana Hospital, and the good news is that there are no head or internal injuries. Today he was transferred to Temple University Hospital in Philadelphia where an operation is supposed to take place tomorrow or Wednesday. Reconstruction of bone around the hip joint is required to keep the knuckle in the socket. He is going through a tough time, and our hopes and prayers go out to him and his parents for his full and speedy recovery. We miss you, Bill.

Tom

