

## MAY 11, 2009 F.A.H.P. NEWS

**The Harrington Raceway and the Delaware State Fair:** In the southwestern part of Kent County, Delaware, on 300 acres just south of the town of Harrington, lies the Harrington Fairgrounds, home of the annual Delaware State Fair. The property was granted a Casino license several years ago to compete with Delaware Park (between Wilmington and Newark) and Dover Downs, the only other casinos in the State. Harrington has been in the headlines the past few days, as the General Assembly in Dover passed a bill, pushed by Governor Jack Markell, allowing Sports Betting all over the State. The Harrington people say it will drastically affect their gambling revenues and make it impossible to break even. The State Fair, a not-for-profit corporation, owns a controlling share in the whole thing.

I must tread lightly as I'm not a farmer, and the above is what I've read in our local newspaper. Delaware still has a large community of farmers south of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal (which crosses the State about 15 miles south of Wilmington), covering 90% of the State's area. To most of them the annual State Fair is a social highlight (and a lot of hard work), not only for the many competitions, but for visiting and living with friends who share a common bond. It runs for a full 8 days in late July, and usually is marked by extremely hot weather.

Back in the 1930's, the harvesting of fruits and vegetables was big business in downstate Delaware. Before the advent of frozen foods, all the "big people" like Heinz, Campbell, and Libby, McNeill & Libby, operated large canneries, along with famous local ones such as Richardson & Robbins of Dover and Cannon Brands of Bridgeville. Chickens were raised in large quantity, perhaps first by John G. Townsend of Selbyville, long pre-dating Frank Perdue and Tyson. Peaches were a major crop in the 1920's and '30's. At the Nassau Orchards, less than 10 miles from Rehoboth Beach, you could pick your own off the ground for 15 cents per basket, or buy baskets picked from the trees for 35 cents. A peach basket was ½ bushel.

In the 1930's the Fair at Harrington was advertised as the "Kent-Sussex Fair", and took place in late July as at present. At that time, there was a harness track, and racing took place on a fairly regular basis during the warm-weather months. After World War II, it became the Delaware State Fair. The track and harness racing are still there, but the investment in permanent buildings and the total acreage covered are much greater than 70 years ago.

There were two traps ("fields") on the fairgrounds for trapshooting during late fall, winter, and early spring. Since the shot fell close to the track, this was discontinued during the racing season. About mid-April, the final trapshoot, or club championship, of the year was held on a week day. When I was secretary-treasurer of the Delaware State Trapshooting Association (1941-1950 except for wartime service), we promoted this event as the Kent County Championship. Since it was held on a week day, the attendance was not large but shooters from all over were encouraged to come, and the two times I went in the late 1940's, about 10 from northern Delaware attended and shot the 50-target program, plus perhaps 15 from Kent County who were eligible to compete for their county championship. It was often won by one of the Simpson brothers of Harrington. As darkness came, the women's auxiliary of the Harrington Fire Company put on a delicious home-cooked turkey dinner with all the trimmings for \$1.25.

Lou Mandich reported a successful car show at the Willowdale Steeplechase event yesterday, but, unfortunately, no cars from our Auburn Heights collection attended. This next Saturday, May 16, from 1:00 to 3:00 P.M. our Museum will be open FREE as part of the "Free to the First State" promotion of most of the fine museums in our area. Chuck Erikson and Art Sybell have offered to cover our museum for us. That day, we are also due at BELLEVUE State Park for their annual Mayfair (the event runs Saturday and Sunday, May 16 and 17, but we plan to attend only on Saturday). Dan Citron, Dave Lumley, Jerry Lucas, and Catherine Coin plan to be there with our Models 735 and H-5, and a mini FAHP Gift Shop. The 735 will give rides from late morning until about 4 P.M. On Sunday, May 17, the annual Linvilla Orchards car show operated by the Historical Car Club of Pennsylvania takes place south of Media, PA, and operators of several of our cars plan to participate. It is a 35-mile round-trip over easy roads. For those not qualified to drive, plenty of seats should be available in one of our cars. Departure from Auburn Heights will be about 9:30 A.M. (confirm this with Bill Schwoebel if you plan to go), and arrival back at Auburn Heights should be well before 6:00. The same day, May 17, the Wilmington & Western R.R. celebrates the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of its flagship steam locomotive #98 with ceremonies at 11 A.M. I have been asked to speak and I may take a Stanley to help promote FAHP. Following the speeches, the 12:30 train will be double-headed by two steam locomotives, #98 and #58 for the trip to the Mount Cuba Picnic Grove and return. For those not going to Linvilla, this will be an outstanding event in which to participate.

The Memorial Day parade in Kennett Square is on Monday, May 25, and we have been asked to have several cars participating. Anne Cleary is chairperson for this event, and she would like to know A.S.A.P. how many of you who are qualified want to go and what car you'd like to take. I think line-up on the west side of Kennett is at about 9 A.M., but Anne has the details. Please call or E-mail her (302) 239-0777, [clearyak@verizon.net](mailto:clearyak@verizon.net).

Meetings taking place this week are the Events Committee on Tuesday, 5/12 at 7:00 P.M. in the office, the Collections Committee on Wednesday, 5/13, also at 7:00 in the office, and the Auburn Valley R.R. sub-committee and lecture on Thursday, 5/14, starting at 7:00, probably in the office. For all who hope to be involved in the Auburn Valley operation this year, and we hope there will be many, it is important that you attend if at all possible.

The steel ring for the turntable improvement, in four pieces, has been delivered, and will now be fabricated and installed, along with new wheels and center bearing, by outside contract. The Museum improvements, headed by Steve Bryce, are moving along well, and the new arrangement of cars and special exhibits seems appealing. An early 10-H.P. engine, being assembled for a hands-on display, has been painted in several colors by Walter Higgins and Steve Bryce and the rear axle for this set-up is nearly ready for assembly. It is important that we get all new signing, indoor and outdoor, completed and in place soon, as it is only 3 weeks until our first public event on June 7. I will see if we can get more cast iron bases made and on hand for our sign and rope standards in the museum. Jim Personti has nearly completed the popcorn machine engine rebuilding, and the newly-lined water tank for the Model 78. Bob Reilly has sent final proofs for the spring edition of the *Auburn Heights Herald*, which we hope to have off the press before our May Board Meeting on the 21<sup>st</sup>. THANKS TO ALL! Tom