

FAHP News, June 2, 2014

CLIFFORD W. MURRAY (1896-1981): Albert Clifford William Murray (1896-1981): Clifford was a black man (we never would have called him that) who worked at Auburn Heights for 50 years. His mother, Ida Murray (1866-1953), worked for my mother as a cook, laundress, and house cleaner and lived in the apartment over the garage from 1928 to 1933. She was a wonderful woman of the “old school” and excellent at the jobs she undertook. When my parents were looking for an outside handyman in 1929, her only son, Clifford, was looking for a job. Ida said she could not recommend him, but she knew he was honest. One Sunday afternoon in early September, he came for an interview that was held on the front porch of Auburn Heights (it had summer outdoor furniture, rope rugs, awnings, and rose trellises in those days). The next thing I knew Clifford was washing one of my father’s Packards under the shed in front of the garage. We soon became fast friends, a relationship that lasted until his death in January 1981.

Clifford thought he had lost his job on New Year’s Day 1930. He had taken my grandmother’s cousin, Gertrude Whittock, back to her apartment in Media and was returning alone in my mother’s 1929 Packard sedan when he turned over on the ice on Miller’s Hill, just east of Kennett Square. He was unhurt, and the car was restorable; he made up for this mishap many times over in the years to come. My mother called him “Clifford,” my father “Cliff” or “Murray,” and I had many names for him, as he did for me. Some of mine: “Cliffey,” “C. Murray” (the way he signed his name), and “Crimmin.” His names for me included “Jack” and “George.” He was known all over Yorklyn as Cliff and very popular with the local population. He was a pillar in Chippey Chapel A.U.M.P. Church and the black community in Hockessin. I got him into trouble more than once, such as the time I dared him to jump across the mill race in his hip boots. He made it but sprained his ankle.

During World War II, Clifford could have gone to work in the mills for a lot more money than he was making here, but he stayed with my parents because he knew they needed him. In the 1930s, he had helped my mother with her rock gardens, and after the war, he helped my father with his antique cars, in addition to his other duties, including some housework. When he could no longer work every day, I encouraged him to come when he felt like it, and this he did until 1979, 50 years after his first visit. At his funeral service, the family asked me to sit with them in the front row, and I was honored to do so. I’ve been wanting to tell you about my friend Clifford for a long time; he was very special.

Work Report: Steve Bryce was in charge of the Work Session on Tuesday, May 27, with the following eight volunteers present: Ted Kamen, Bob Jordan, Jerry Lucas, Tom Marshall, Gary Green, Paul Kratunis, and Ken Ricketts.

A larger section of the garage floor was prepped and painted. Smaller temporary nozzles were made for the new burner on the Model K. Holes around the bonnet on the Model 735 were patched with mineral wool and Diplag. The burner forks on this car were thoroughly cleaned as was the car's front end, and the condenser shell and hub caps were polished. The Mountain Wagon was checked over and prepped for its use on June 1. The movable portion of the railroad switch near Little Toot was removed for repair, and the Lionel electric trains were checked over for their use on the upcoming Steamin' Day.

Bill Schwoebel was in charge on Thursday, May 29, with the following 14 volunteers on hand: Steve Bryce, Jerry Novak, Lou Mandich, Tim Ward, Jim Personti, Geoff Fallows, Mike Ciosek, Gary Green, Bob Stransky, Mark Russell, Mac Taylor, Ed Paschall, and Tom Marshall.

The AVRR track was checked over, and a few adjustments were made. The damaged section of the railroad switch, having been repaired in the shop, was replaced. New brushes for cleaning locomotive boiler tubes were obtained. The diesel-style locomotive was fueled up for its runs on June 1. The Model 735 was moved to the museum and the Rauch & Lang electric brought to the garage. Door hinges were adjusted on this car to improve the fit and operation of one of the doors. Small scratches were polished out.

The museum was "touched up" for Sunday's visitors, all cars were cleaned and polished, and our new Model T Ford received attention prior to its use on June 1. Fresh fuel was added, the spark plugs were cleaned and reset, and the timer was removed and cleaned. The car was started, and it ran very well. During our Steamin' Day, it is planned to start the "T" next to the firing-up demonstration of a Stanley to show how different it was to operate a "gas car" vs. a steam car. Fluorescent fixtures and BX cable were hunted to install better lighting on the north end of the garage, and most of what is needed has been found.

On Friday 5/30, the Maute brothers were on hand to clean flangeways at the grade crossings of the A.V.R.R., and other volunteers such as Tim Nolan, Bill Rule, and Mike Ciosek were here to take care of special projects.