

Sunday Evening Musicales: In the mid-1930s, about six families would gather for summer evening sit-down dinners, usually on the lawn if the weather was cooperative. At least three of the hosts were the Woodwards of Mendenhall (PA), the Mancills, also of Mendenhall, and the Marshalls of Auburn Heights. While all six participating families may have brought food, the host family was in charge and did most of the preparation and work. To a 10-year-old, this group of possibly 25 people seemed like a very large gathering, and my cousins, Eleanor Marshall and the Mancill twins, joined me in creating numerous discipline problems for our parents.

It seemed that this group expanded to include a local musical program following dinner. Then it got so large that dinner was not possible, so it was a Sunday evening musicale. How many of these were held and for how many summers they occurred, I am not certain. However, I remember one at Auburn Heights when nearly 70 people attended. All cars were parked along the driveway, in some places two abreast, as the drive then ended opposite the door to the shop, and there was no “loop” around the east side of the house. Neither was the lot across the road accessible, as it was owned by the Snuff company and was cut off from Route 82 by a barbed wire fence to keep Joe DeStafney’s grazing cattle out of the road.

The guests sat mostly in the big living room, with the audience spilling over into the front hall. In the living room’s round alcove with five bay windows was my mother’s Baby Grand piano, used by the performers doing recitals or performing piano accompaniment. A quartet of the barber shop variety seemed to sing from the other end of the room, however. Paul Hannum, a building contractor in Kennett Square (and a second cousin of my father) sat in the leather-covered armchair still in the front hall. Isaac and Edith Wetherill from Chester (Edith was a Mitchell) also attended. His family built the Wetherill Corliss steam engines, very choice today. There must have been about six acts in the evening’s musicale. Two of them I remember well. One was a men’s quartet from Kennett Square. Two of its members with good voices were Scott McMurtrie (baritone or bass) and Monroe Nute (tenor). Scott was active in local theatrical productions and ran the House of Flowers for James B. D. Edge Jr., and Monnie Nute owned the Chrysler-Plymouth dealership in Kennett. The other feature of my recollection was a piano solo and accompaniment by the Passmore sisters of Mendenhall. Helen played the piano, and Lydia had a very good soprano voice. I don’t know how we snuck in, but the Mancill boys and I were on the front row. When Lydia would hit the high notes, we would burst out in laughter. Since the room was crowded, our parents could not get to us to shut us down. If the Division of Parks ever has a musicale in the living room, I promise to behave better.

Work Report: On Tuesday, April 26, 19 volunteers were in attendance: Mark Russell (in charge), John Bacino, Mark Bodestab, Steve Bryce, Mike Ciosek, Anne Cleary, Dennis Dragon, Ken Hilbeck, Bob Jordan, Ted Kamen, Bob Koury, Paul Kratunis, Dave Leon, Tom Marshall, Brent McDougall, Tom Sandbrook, John Schubel, Mac Taylor, and Jay Williams.

Installation of the rebuilt trucks on our heavy-duty wooden passenger car was completed, and a nine-car train with the diesel locomotive was pulled around the loop several times with passengers aboard. Photos and displays were arranged in the museum for Train Day and the Evenings at the Museum electric train program on May 3.

Work on the new wiring harness in the ’37 Packard was continued. Three cars were rearranged in the museum to make room for the special Train Day exhibits. The smoke bonnet for the Model 735 was

tried and approved for a final fit. The area of the pilot was “muddled up,” so the car is now ready to be fired up again.

On Wednesday afternoon, April 27, six volunteers turned out, as follows: Bill Schwoebel (in charge), Tom Marshall, Mike Ciosek, Dave Leon, Jerry Novak, and Steve Bryce.

Using compressed air and jacking the drive wheels, the slide valves on Locomotive 401 were set “by sound.” This is a stop-gap effort to keep #401 running until #402 is back in service. The '32 Packard, set to go to Winterthur on May 7, had its top put down, and it was started and checked out. The reconditioned safety valve from the Model CX was installed and an attempt was made to fire up the car. It turned out the peek hole was blocked, and time ran out, so this operation was not completed.

On Wednesday evening, teacher Kelly Williams had a Stanley operators' class for students Dave Stransky and Jeff Kennard.

On Thursday, April 28, nine volunteers were on hand: Tom Marshall (in charge), Larry Tennity, Mike Ciosek, Steve Bryce, Ted Kamen, Bob Stransky, Jared Schoenly, Jim Personti, and Geoff Fallows.

On the Model 76, some water fittings were leaking near the pumps, and several were taken apart for repair. The Gift Shop carts were moved from the museum to the garage in preparation for Train Day on May 1. The pump drive was hooked up on the Model H-5, with its newly rebuilt engine in place.

More switch work was done on the '37 Packard. The pump house was cleaned out in preparation for temporary storage of surplus items. Some final checking was done in the turntable area for the May 1 operation.

The bonnet was properly fit and fastened in place on the Model 735. Since location of fittings on the top head of the boiler was changed from the discarded boiler, a number of open slots were patched with sheet metal. It is now ready for final insulation and “paper hanging.”

The rebuilt chassis from Locomotive 402 was returned and off-loaded on AVRR track at the rear grade crossing, then pushed to the turntable and stored in the engine house. Jim Personti, with help from Geoff Fallows, has performed this work. The rear truck is still in Jim's shop in the finishing stages, and the final assembly will be done by them and the AVRR team in our shop. The springs, side rods, connecting rods, brakes, and valve gear are still to be installed. The mechanism on this locomotive was worn out after 55 years (as is the 401), and its rebuilding was an absolute necessity.

On Saturday, Steve Bryce completed replacement of the defective piping on the Model 76 and test-drove it several miles in preparation for its trip to Dover Days on May 7. The perch poles and their adjusting rods were fastened in place on the Model H-5. Jonathan Rickerman and Brent McDougall installed the track for his garden railroad next to the museum, and Mac Taylor and his son-in-law set up their special electric train in the former North Bedroom of the Mansion. Rose Ann Hoover also displayed trains there from her outstanding collection.