

December 18, 2006

Hello, Steam Team:

Christmas, 1934, at Auburn Heights: To a 10-year-old in a family that could afford to buy him too many toys, the whole month of December was an exciting time of anticipation, and the number of days until Christmas were always counted quite accurately. Having been in bed and weak with pneumonia over Christmas, 1932, and at my Grandmother Shallcross' in 1933, the Shallcross and Ferguson families coming here in 1934 was indeed to be a special occasion. In addition to all this, we would be showing off our new kitchen, finished early in the year, with its recreation room underneath, my new playroom! Even though Santa Claus was no longer expected, I couldn't wait for Christmas morning.

When I arrived in the kitchen early in the morning, the door to the lower level was locked. Soon this was remedied and as I raced down the steps, here on the floor was the greatest Lionel layout I had ever seen. Although previously I had two standard-gauge electric trains and one O-gauge train that ran on the circular railway, here was a layout that included about six electric switches, a couple of semaphore signals, a turntable, a lighted station platform, and a passenger train with a 400-E steam-type locomotive! With the Depression taking its toll on many people, my father had bought this wonderful equipment in one lot from a family in Philadelphia that had fallen on hard times. Much of it was just two years old. I didn't deserve it, but I still have most of it, and it operates in the Museum 72 years later.

The Weekly News of December 19, 2005, told of Christmas, 1929, when my mother and her helpers fed 22 family members for Christmas dinner. Our number was reduced by 1934, however, as it was decided that Uncle Jay and his family would no longer be included, as it made "just too many". He and Aunt Bess had 5 daughters and 4 of them were either married or engaged by Christmastime, 1934, and they had a big family gathering of their own. So, about 12 sat down at the dining room table here for my father to carve the turkey. Grandmother Shallcross, then 82 (my age now), was ill at her home in Middletown, and Uncle Ned stayed home with her. As usual we had a sumptuous dinner at Auburn Heights, finished off with mince or pumpkin pie. Although our new kitchen had an electric stove, I think the home-grown turkey was roasted in the more-trusted wood stove, which was located for a number of years in the laundry room below the original kitchen.

Sometime in early evening, Norman Mancill, who had been born at Auburn Heights just 20 years before (and my first cousin on my father's side of the family), stopped in to pick up Gene Ferguson, my 19-year-old cousin on my mother's side, and take him and their dates to the annual Christmas dance in Kennett Square. Lorraine Marshall, also

my first cousin, and S. John Pyle, to whom she was engaged, stopped by as well; perhaps they were headed for the same dance. The young ladies were decked out in long evening gowns and the young men in tuxedos, and they did look sharp! Then this 10-year-old was sent to bed after an exciting day.

Last week, the Nominating Committee, chaired by Jerry Lucas, and the Events Committee, chaired by Anne Cleary, met in the F.A.H.P. office. The Nominating Committee is scheduled to meet again this Thursday, December 21, and the Events Committee will meet in January to finalize the schedule of public events here in 2007. Bill Schwoebel is calling together the new team leaders to fine-tune our work projects along the lines tentatively approved at our recent volunteers' meeting.

This meeting is TOMORROW NIGHT, December 19, at 7:30 P.M. in the F.A.H.P. office. We hope all team leaders can attend. We hope to get the system in place for undertaking several winter projects right after January 1.

Last Tuesday, new members Kelly Williams and Steve Bryce, along with Art Wallace, unhooked all the piping and lifted the boiler out of the '13 Model 76. Art removed some more of the tangled tubing Thursday evening, and it is planned to simplify this when piping up the replacement boiler. We are cleaning up and tightening bolts under the hood while the boiler is out. It is our plan to use the old boiler for display purposes in the museum's Stanley parts exhibit, and to take the re-tubed boiler now in that exhibit for installation in the Model 76. Walter Higgins, Ted Simpkins, and Emil Christofano installed the newly-relined brake bands on the '22 Model 740, and worked on the speedometer cable and drive from the Rauch & Lang electric. Jim Personti with the help of Dale Simpkins soldered leaking areas of the old water tank from the '05 Model CX, and it appears to be a good job. We are hopeful of getting some more years from this oddly-shaped tank. Art Sybell and Ron Turochy made a new box for coal and wood storage near the station for use when the railroad is running. On Saturday I got the boilers washed on both our locomotives and flushed out the water tank on the #401. A little washing soda was added and both tanks and boilers are completely full for winter storage.

Jim, Rob Robison, and Art Wallace discovered the problem with

the steam leak on the '18 Model 735. The flare on the steel pipe where the hot end of the superheater fastens to the loop on the steam pipe behind the boiler has lost its angle and the flare nut was pulling up beyond the edge of the flare. The loop must come out to re-flare this.

That will be a good project for this week. Betty Hoffmeister has been very helpful to Bob Reilly in the office and she may come tomorrow to help me complete processing some new membership applications and acknowledgements for our annual appeal. Actually, Bob does the processing in Colorado, and sends everything to us to complete the mailing to these new members and contributors. I think our present membership stands at 145.

Finally, Chazz Salkin, Director of the Division of Parks and Recreation, has worked it out with the Motor Vehicle Division to transfer title to the collection's cars from me to F.A.H.P. without payment of the transfer tax, a huge saving. This should clear the way for immediate transfer of the first four cars, plus the Mobile steamer (from Alexis duPont). The titles on which some of the information is wrong can be corrected at the same time.

While there are meetings here both Tuesday and Thursday evenings, work projects will taper off until after the holidays. If you are involved in a particular project and want to move it along, you are welcome to come on these evenings or at any other time, but "official work sessions" will not start again until Tuesday, January 2, 2007. Since next Monday is Christmas Day, the Weekly News next week will probably be dated and sent on December 26. Ruth and I want to take this opportunity to thank every one of you for all you have done for us and our projects during 2006, and we wish you and your families a very Merry Christmas and a Joyous Holiday Season.

Tom