

F.A.H.P. News, July 23, 2012

Einstein, Wiener, and Hitchcock: The three qualify as “Absent-Minded Professors” of the early 20th century. All were brilliant men, but most of you are familiar only with Albert Einstein (1879-1955) and his appearance, his connection with Princeton University, and his Theory of Relativity. There is no question that he was the best known of the three. My favorite quote from Einstein is: “If we knew what we were doing, there would be no need for research.”

Norbert Wiener (1894-1964) was a child prodigy from Missouri who attained a Ph.D. at the age of 17. When I was at M.I.T. from 1942 to 1944, he was Professor of Mathematics and Cybernetics, who probably taught only graduate students while working on his many advanced discoveries. Freshmen and meteorology students such as I were never taught by Professor Wiener, but we saw him often. Frequently, he would leave his office in the main M.I.T. building and start toward Walker Memorial Hall for his lunch. He was the least athletic looking man I ever saw, and partway to his lunch destination, he would reverse and return to his office, believing that he had finished lunch and was ready to advance his brilliant theory, whatever it was at that particular time. Usually staring at the sky instead of the path ahead, he embodied the perfect absent-minded professor. People like Irene du Pont Jr. and a young David Nergaard, associated with M.I.T. during those years, probably remember him well.

Professor Hitchcock may have been the least absent-minded, and he was a very nice man. A brilliant mathematician, he had retired from M.I.T. just before World War II began. With the shortage of teachers, they called him back, and he taught me freshman calculus, or he tried very hard to do so. He had poor eyes and very thick glasses, and he was used to teaching upper classmen in advanced subjects. It was very difficult for him to bring his thinking down to the college freshman level, but he was extremely patient, and he tried very hard to make us understand. I barely passed, but I recalled my calculus teacher most fondly.

About eight years later, George Woodbury of Bedford, New Hampshire, wrote a book entitled *The Story of a Stanley Steamer*. Woodbury, who had restored and was operating an ancestral water-powered mill near his home, had bought a 1917 Model 730 Stanley from Donald Randall (from whom I bought our Model 607 in 1946). Randall was referred to in the book as Professor Coates. Fred Marriott restored Woodbury’s car mechanically about 1949. In one of the book’s chapters, Woodbury talked about those who would come into his office in the mill just to chat, especially during the “January thaw.” Professor Hitchcock, finally retired again from M.I.T., was one of Woodbury’s frequent visitors.

Work Report: On Monday, July 16, Steve Bryce asked all who had participated in the Vermont Steam Car Tour the week before to come and clean up the cars and trailers that were used. Butch Cannard, Dave Leon, Tim Nolan, and Art Wallace answered the call, and the five of them did an excellent job.

I was not on hand Tuesday night with Jerry Lucas in charge as the flue was dropped on the Model 76 in preparation for repairing the feed water heater that had to be by-passed on the tour.

Bob Jordan with his chief assistant Ted Kamen are to be commended for their persistence in getting the Model 607 reassembled. Things are coming together nicely, and progress can be seen each week. We are indebted to Don Bourdon for the longtime loan of a picture album showing all angles of the car Don restored for Richard Dickey, a copy of our 607—it continues to be most helpful.

Thursday night, July 19, was our monthly ice cream run to Woodside Farm Creamery. The Mountain Wagon and our three condensing cars made the trip with a total of 18 passengers. In addition, Susan, with the help of our new Volunteer Coordinator Jenn Green, set up a promotion table near the ice cream shop, at which they showed off some of Jesse Gagnon's new children's games as well as promoted FAHP and our Steamin' Days.

Eight more volunteers elected to work in the shop. Bob Jordan worked alone on the 607, and Jim Personti, Geoff Fallows, Brent McDougall, and a friend of Brent's worked on the spring hangers and equalizing bars on Locomotive 402, after Jim had fabricated some new hangers and pins. Butch and the Maute boys worked on other necessary jobs.

On Friday, Susan and I entertained Art Carey, a writer for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, with a full tour of the museum and mansion, as well as a four-mile Mountain Wagon ride. Carey promised us a story and will probably send a photographer in a few days. On Saturday, Brent McDougall, Robert Hopkins, and Bill Schwoebel ran a locomotive training class during which time at least two trainees ran the 401 around the AVRR a few times. The 402 still has spring problems, which will be addressed. We were glad to welcome Bill back to Auburn Heights on both Tuesday and Saturday.