

February 5, 2007

Hello, Steam Team:

February 9, 1934, was probably the coldest day of the 20th century in Yorklyn. When I went out the front door to go to school about 8 A.M., the large thermometer on the porch read minus 18 degrees. I believe the official low in Wilmington was minus 10 degrees. It was an unusually cold winter. On my 10th birthday a few days after the coldest day, a blizzard caused us to come home from Wilmington via Kennett Square, the only way the roads were passable.

That was the winter our new kitchen was being built on the rear of the original house. My cousin, Mary Comly Shallcross, who liked to be called "Comie", celebrated her 19th birthday at Auburn Heights that same February, as she was living with us through the week while attending Beacom College at 10th & Jefferson Streets in Wilmington. She would go home to her parents' farm outside Odessa on weekends, sometimes by train to Middletown. Comie had lots of boy friends and one of them would usually bring her back to Yorklyn Sunday night. Within a year thereafter, she settled on one of them, and she and Donald Drake Coffman were married at Old Drawyers Church in September, 1935.

I liked having Comie with us. Although a sophisticated young lady, she was a lot of fun for a 10-year-old. In the evening, we would often explore the unfinished new kitchen and watch the progress of its interior design. The rear wall of the house had been cut through, allowing direct access from the small pantry adjacent thereto. Studding for the partitions seemed everywhere, with electric wires being strung in them. Not only were there to be electric lights, but a circuit for an electric stove, another for a refrigerator, and even a panel box with call bells and arrows to show where in the house the call was originating. Unfortunately, I cannot remember that call bells were ever used. Their time had passed. In the floor plan was a large pantry with sink at one end, a swinging door from there to the kitchen proper, and a sunny breakfast nook with windows on two sides. A large double window was immediately above a double-bowl sink in the main kitchen, surrounded by long monel-metal drain boards. The stove had three enclosed compartments, from bottom to top: the main oven, the broiler, and a warming oven to retard cooling. Four open burners of early electrical design were part of the stove alongside the enclosed portions. The white Frigidaire had four doors, with its sulfur dioxide compressor in a small room under the kitchen porch.

The new room below the kitchen was to be called a Recreation Room, and it replaced the room over the porte-co-chere as my playroom, and where I set up the electric trains. Before it was occupied that way, my parents had a party to christen the room, and two long tables

were set for a sumptuous turkey dinner. The wood stove from the old kitchen had been installed in the laundry next to the new Recreation Room, and the turkeys were roasted there. At least once in the 1930's, our Christmas tree was set up and trimmed in the Recreation Room, complementing the Lionel standard-gauge electric train layout. In 1937, my parents gave me a small pool table that was set up on one side of this room, about where I am sitting tonight at my computer as I recall things 70 years ago.

Bob Reilly returned to Yorklyn Saturday night and he is working on the presentation the AACA Museum has asked us to make at the AACA Annual Meeting in Philadelphia Saturday morning, February 10. We are also going to have three booths in the Trade Show, thanks to Mike Jones, and our Model K Stanley will occupy two of them. The Show runs from 8:00 to 5:00 on Friday and 8:00 to 4:00 on Saturday, and it will be desirable to have volunteers manning our exhibit when Bob can't be there (or even when he is, some of the time). The Maute brothers, Chuck Carisch, Art Wallace and I have offered to help if needed. Jerry Novak and Emil Christofano will go with me and possibly Bob on Thursday morning with our trailer and the Model K to get it at its display location before noon that day, and to set up our other exhibit materials. Art Wallace and Dan Nichols plan to handle the exhibit at the Newark Senior Center on Friday from 9:00 to 2:00, and they will go Thursday afternoon to set that one up. Thank you, one and all. If any others plan to be in Philadelphia Friday or Saturday and can help out at the Trade Show, please let us know. It's in the Sheraton Hotel, formerly the Wyndham/Franklin Plaza at 17th and Race Streets.

As has been mentioned, our Annual Membership Meeting will be held in the Museum on Thursday night, February 15, at 7:30 P.M. We hope you will find the agenda informative and interesting. In addition to the election of directors and other business, a short program of entertainment will be presented at the conclusion of the business meeting. We hope you can plan to attend. Committees of FAHP are also busy this month. Tomorrow night (2/6) a joint Finance/Development Committee meeting takes place in the FAHP office at 7:30, and on Wednesday (2/7) at 7:00 an ad hoc committee to advise us how to begin our long-term strategic plan will meet at the same place. There may be additional Board Committee meetings on February 21 or 22 prior to our Annual Board meeting on the 22nd at 7:30. The Events Committee will meet on Tuesday, February 27, at 7:30 in the FAHP office. Bob and Barb Reilly plan to attend the Small Museums Conference in Ocean City, MD, February 25-27. Finally, on March 21, the State Parks' Friends Forum will take place at the new Blue Ball facility, and we will be asking for one or more volunteers who would like to attend along with Bob Reilly.

New flyers are being printed showing the dates of our public openings at Auburn Heights in 2007. The first Sundays of May, July and September plus two 2-day weekends similar to last year are scheduled.

House tours will be available on our October weekend, Oct. 27 and 28, and our Thanksgiving event will be essentially the same as in 2006, the Friday and Saturday following Thanksgiving, Nov. 23 and 24, 2007.

Work projects continue to progress well with team leaders keeping ahead of the work sessions with projects outlined for individual teams. Often these projects and responsibilities have crossed, which is not unexpected. We know all regular volunteers are willing to cross over and work where needed most at a particular time. Cab work has moved along well on Locomotive 402, and both engines are soon to have new paint jobs. Rose Ann has met with her museum committee and outlined projects to be undertaken in the next two months or so. She has a contractor coming tomorrow to give us ideas on ceiling treatment for the main museum. A contact has been made for implementation of 3 much-needed R.R. projects, the bank stabilization, the turntable, and the tunnel clearances. We should have some cost estimates in about 2 weeks; the bank stabilization is by far the largest project of the three. The water tank is back in and hooked up on the Model CX, thanks to Art Sybell, Ron Turochy and Steve Bryce. The smoke bonnet, cover, and seat can be put back in place and the car moved to the museum awaiting a new burner. Jim Personti and Jeff Fallows made a new superheater for this car and it needs to be installed as well. The Model K has been drained and will be towed in our trailer to and from Philadelphia "dry", so freezing will not be a problem. Upon its return, we may plan some limited burner work on this car. The new water tank for the Model 71, finished except for soldering on the top, was checked for proper dimensions last week, and since it fit in the car very well, it should be completely finished in a few days. Best wishes to all, and keep warm! Tom