

FAHP News, November 28, 2016

Norman Clarence Mancill (1914-1988): Norman was born at Auburn Heights on November 28, 1914, 102 years ago today. He is the only one ever born in the big house and was one of my 12 first cousins. While I am not sure, I think he was born in the northeast bedroom of the second floor with five bay windows under one of the turrets. Norman was the eldest son of Norman Bernard and Anna Marshall Mancill, who had been married in the front hall in January 1912, seven months after the death of Anna's father, Israel Marshall. In later years members of the family would refer to the two Normans as "Father Norman" and "Normie," although Uncle Norman called his son "Bear."

Father Norman was a salesman for the American Roads Machinery Company of Kennett Square. Soon after his marriage, he was assigned to Western Canada, where he sold snow plows, road equipment, and farm machinery made by his employer. The newlyweds lived in Calgary, Alberta, and he traveled extensively through Alberta and Saskatchewan, calling on potential customers. Neither Norman nor Anna liked being so far from home, so by 1913 he had resigned from his job, and they were living back at Auburn Heights with Anna's widowed mother and her bachelor brother, Clarence. The latter, a Stanley dealer, bought his sister a 1913 Model 65 and taught her how to operate it.

Norman was interested in selling automobiles (not steamers), and he established a small business with a showroom in Wilmington for this purpose. Clarence helped him at first, but the business was really not successful. I'm not sure what makes of cars they sold, but, like many dealers of the time, it was more than one marque. The Mancills were living at Auburn Heights when their first son was born. By 1918 or so, they had moved to an apartment in Wilmington and in 1923 bought a property along Kennett Pike north of Mendenhall that they named "Linger Longer." Norman had become a road and earth-moving contractor, which occupation he continued until his death in 1937.

"Normie" was a holy terror when he was young. He grew to be tall and thin, like his father, and loved the social life. He was sent to Wilmington Friends School and later to George School, a Quaker boarding school in Bucks County northeast of Philadelphia. In 1933 or '34, he entered Penn State as a freshman. He got poor marks because he didn't try, but he enjoyed fraternity life. In my father's new '34 Packard Twelve limousine, the Mancills and the Marshalls, seven in all, went to visit young Norman at State College one weekend. We stayed at the Nittany Lion Inn, saw a Penn State football game, and visited Normie's fraternity house, where one of the members was our second cousin, senior Thomas E. Marshall II. The Mancills bought Normie a '34 Lafayette, made by Nash for two or three years to compete with Ford, Chevrolet, and Plymouth.

My mother was always looking for an excuse to have a party at Auburn Heights. During Christmas vacation, with most of Normie's friends around Kennett Square home for the holidays, she told her nephew to invite a dozen or more for an evening party. I was 10 or 12 years old, but I remember some who attended: Jay Swayne, Bill Worrall (the undertaker's son), Bill Scarlett, Chandler "Chizzy" Bernard (an uncle of our Richard Bernard), Nancy Farquhar, Jane Swayne, and Mary Marshall (Normie's second cousin). I'm sure there was a dinner of some sort. The rugs and furniture were removed from the front hall, and the guests danced to music of the day played on a 78-r.p.m. Victrola.

Normie's father died early in 1937, and he came home from Penn State to help his mother close out the business. When this was complete, his uncle, J. Warren Marshall, offered him a job with Marshall Brothers paper mill. He worked there for over 30 years, first as an assistant superintendent to Roy Bengé and finally as superintendent. In the fall of 1938, an attractive young woman from Delaware County named June Baker began her teaching career at Kennett Consolidated School. In June 1940, June and Norman were married in the Presbyterian Church in Wallingford, Pennsylvania, with the reception at the Strath Haven Inn in Swarthmore. Norman and June had three children, Mary Louise (1942-), Ann (1945-), and Alan (1954-). Norman died in Florida in 1988, and June died in the late 1990s.

Work Report: On Tuesday, November 22, 17 volunteers were on hand for the work session and the mini-lecture on fasteners. Neal Sobocinski assisted Tom with the lecture. In attendance were Anne Cleary, Brent McDougall, Steve Bryce, Ted Kamen, Bob Jordan, Jerry Novak, Bob Wilhelm, Dave Leon, John Bacino, Mike Ciosek, Ken Hilbeck, Neal Sobocinski, Richard Bernard, Bob Koury, Dennis Tiley, Paul Kratunis, and Tom Marshall (in charge).

A holding door cable was repaired on one of the “red” passenger cars on the A.V.R.R. The popcorn machine and the gift shop carts were moved from the museum to the garage in preparation for “Steamin’ Thanksgiving” on November 26. Several wire splices were improved on the ’37 Packard, correcting the problem affecting the head lights and dash lights.

On Wednesday, November 23, two volunteers showed up, Jerry Novak (in charge) and Tom Marshall. Most of the effort was spent on shop organization. Decisions were made for more logical storage of nuts, bolts, and much-used tools, and many items designated as surplus were identified. Some small boxes are needed to separate small items in large drawers. (Several plastic containers with lids were donated by Dave Leon. These will serve us well, and we can use more.)

As the holiday period moves along, next week our sessions will be normal: Tuesday, November 29, Wednesday, November 30, and Thursday, December 1. On Friday, December 2, our Annual F.A.H.P. Holiday Party takes place in the museum, starting at 6:00 P.M. On Sunday, December 4 and again on Sunday, December 11, the museum will be open from 12:00 to 4:00, with the Diesel train operating (weather permitting) for our “Old-Fashioned Holidays.” The shop course, this time on pipe, tubing, and fittings, will take place at 7 P.M. on Thursday, December 8, and Tuesday, December 13. Rose Ann Hoover’s “Christmas Chocolate Party” for volunteers will also be on December 13 at 8 P.M. in the museum. Regular work sessions will continue on December 6, 7, and 8 (after the shop course). Thursday, December 15, will be our final work session before the holidays. We hope to see you often during this festive period.