

F.A.H.P. News, June 25, 2012

First Section, Auburn Heights Preserve Trail: This past week, paving was taking place on the first section of the planned six-mile trail, this section a one-mile hillside loop around the former DeStafney farm, purchased by the State of Delaware from NVF at the end of 2002. This initial section, with access from Benge Road below Auburn Heights, is intended for use by hikers, cyclists, and antique car operators and is expected to open this summer. The high point is at an elevation of about 340 feet, with the trail climbing from Red Clay Creek at an elevation of about 185 feet at this location.

The second section to be opened within a year will cross the meadow between Benge Road and Yorklyn Road, with a new bridge crossing the creek (near the old trolley bridge) behind the Marshall Brothers Paper Mill. Hopefully, the third section will parallel the Wilmington & Western Railroad track from Yorklyn to Hockessin. The fourth section will move southeast from Yorklyn Road and the railroad up Gun Club Hill, and the fifth and final section will descend the hill on the east side, to cross Red Clay Creek, Route 82, and the railroad on a high bridge to terminate on Oversee Farm, owned by the state and administered as part of the Auburn Heights Preserve. Naturally, this ambitious plan will take major funding and will require several years to complete.

Lewis DeStafney bought a hillside farm in Mill Creek Hundred near Yorklyn of approximately 125 acres, about 1923. The entrance was from a public road running from the Hockessin Friends Meeting House to Marshall's Bridge in Pennsylvania, a distance of just over two miles. The Marshalls for whom the bridge was named attended Hockessin Friends Meeting because of this road, and that's where my grandparents, Israel and Lizzie (Mitchell), met. When this road behind the DeStafney farm was closed about 1930, Joseph DeStafney, Lewis's son, obtained permission from the Marshall Brothers Paper Company to enter from Benge Road, fording the creek below an old 18th-century dam. In 1937, DeStafney built a low bridge at this ford that washed away in the flood of 1938. His replacement, built much higher above the water, is still used today. It is across this bridge that the new trail is accessed, but the bridge is scheduled for improvement or replacement.

Joe DeStafney occupied the old farmhouse and used the barn for his dairy cattle. His brothers Pete and Jim built new homes near the old house. Later, Joe's son Francis grew mushrooms in a small "house" behind the other buildings. Joe used much of Marshall Brothers, National Fibre, and Helme Snuff Company farmland for grazing his cattle. Most of his fences were barbed wire strung between trees, where this was possible. Sometimes cattle would cross the bridge over the mill race and tramp through my mother's rock garden, before being found on the lawn of Auburn Heights. About 1970, the DeStafney family sold most of the farm to NVF, keeping about eight acres around their homes and outbuildings. NVF, which already owned adjacent land, hoped to develop 400 home sites, but fortunately that plan fell through before it got very far. About 50 acres of the farm, much of it wooded, was in Pennsylvania, and that portion is owned by the Land Conservancy for Southern Chester County. There are great views from the west side of the "DeStafney" property when traveling the new trail.

Work Report: On June 15, at the invitation of Matt Chesser and Dan Citron, we drove our Mountain Wagon, our Model 735, Lou Mandich's early Dodge, and Jerry Novak's '31 Chevy over the one-mile hillside loop trail on Auburn Heights Preserve property just west of Auburn Heights. This trail will be paved 12 feet wide and is intended for use by hikers, cyclists, and antique cars. The grading is complete, and we found no problems encountered by the early cars, but the descent indicated that water-cooled brakes are needed on the Mountain Wagon. We appreciate the construction of a couple of switch-backs to reduce the grade.

Eighteen members attended the work session on Tuesday night, and six more attended the Events Committee meeting. Progress was made on reassembling the Model 607 (you will hear this for some time to come), and it will soon be time to lift the boiler into the car. The rear wheels were pulled from the Model 76 in order to properly bleed the brake cylinders; the operation was successful, and all is back together. In the process of filling the water tank on the Mountain Wagon prior to its test run on the new trail, Tom lost the aluminum filler cap, which has not been found. The "Lionel train" crew made more progress, although we understand the water wheel on the mill needs further refinement. The oil and water was drained from the crankcase on the 1909 White, and it is now empty and ready to be refilled. This does not mean we plan to run the car this summer, but we are simply applying some needed maintenance. Valving and piping for the installation of water-cooled brakes has begun on our Mountain Wagon. The Shop Reorganization Teams reviewed their respective assignments in preparation for initial reports on June 21.

On Thursday, 20 volunteers were on hand, of whom 15 attended the meeting for initial reports from the seven subcommittees working on shop reorganization and improvement. The meeting was successful, with enthusiasm for moving ahead to make needed improvements. Four new subcommittees, superceding the original seven, were suggested and subsequently appointed. Each new committee will tackle one of four vital areas of work and storage, and this work will begin on June 26.

On Tuesday, the following volunteers were on hand: Anne Cleary, Art Sybell, Brent McDougall, Richard Bernard, Jerry Novak, and Rose Ann Hoover, all of whom attended the Events and Scheduling Committee meeting, plus Ted Kamen, Bob Jordan, Dave Leon, Steve Bryce, Butch Cannard, Bill Rule, Art Wallace, Tim Nolan, Tim Ward, Jay Williams, Kelly Williams, Robert Hopkins, Mark Hopkins, Mark Russell, Mac Taylor, Emil Christofano, Jeff Pollock, and Tom Marshall (in charge).

On Thursday, those in attendance were Dave Leon (in charge), Anne Cleary, Bob Jordan, Kelly Williams, Dennis Dragon, Ted Kamen, Richard Bernard, Art Wallace, Tim Nolan, Jerry Novak, Mark Russell, Jeff Pollock, Butch Cannard, Steve Bryce, Chuck Erikson, Lou Mandich, Rob Young, Eugene Maute, Gerhard Maute, and Tom Marshall.