

July 3, 2006

Hello, Steam Team:

Under "Auburn Heights people" I would like to write about Ida Murray (1866-1953). Several months ago I wrote up her son Clifford, a special pal of mine. Ida would have been 140 last Saturday. She was born in Wilmington and as a child, she sledded on 4th Street hill, next to the Quaker Meeting House and the old Wilmington Friends School. Unfortunately in her time, the only occupation available to a black woman was domestic work of some kind, and in this she had few equals.

She married Albert Murray and they lived for a time in a small frame house close to the present Route 41 where the entrance to the Wilmington & Western parking lot is today. Here their two children, Elsie and Clifford, were born. Albert pulled out and Ida was left to raise her children. They both did her proud. She took a job with Darlington Flinn, a fixture around Price's Corner, whose family owned a farm that included all of present-day Greenbank County Park, the Greenbank Mill, much of the Price's Corner Shopping Center, and on the southeast extending almost to the General Motors plant. Darlington Flinn (a bachelor or a widower) had an adopted daughter Margaret, and Ida raised her. Margaret, later McVaugh, became one of Wilmington's most respected travel agents.

In 1928 when Margaret was grown, Ida needed a job and my parents hired her as a cook, laundress, house cleaner, and anything else that had to be done around the house. She was a large, good-natured woman who called both my parents "honey chile", and she always wore a white apron tied in the back. I loved to tie hard knots in her apron strings, and when I was told by my mother not to do it, I continued, it was so much fun. Ida never got mad. It took more harsh means by my mother to eliminate the practice. Ida was a master at handling a wood cook stove as that was what we had in the kitchen in her time. She ate in the kitchen and lived in the apartment over the garage, only about half its present size.

In 1928 or '29 my father, then taking many 16 mm. home movies, made a 4-minute film entitled "Ida and the Snow Man". It should have been titled "Ida building a Snow Man, with Tommy Marshall in the way". As was mentioned in a previous story, her son Clifford came here to work in 1929 (she would not recommend him) and he stayed for 50 years. In 1933, Ida was 67 and wanted to retire from every-day work (then at least six days per week), which she richly deserved, but we were so sorry to see her go. Years before, she had befriended two old black men, possibly distant cousins, who lived in a shack at the corner of Route 41 and Hercules Road. The men died and left Ida the property, about 3/4 of an acre. Clifford, his wife Lula and daughter Reba, were renting from Lula's father, and they wanted a home. So they fixed up

the little house and provided a two room apartment for Ida on the second floor. Ida continued to come to Auburn Heights to help with special parties, and she became a trusted baby-sitter for families near her home.

The last two years of Ida's life, she lived with her daughter Elsie on East Ninth Street in Wilmington, where she died in 1953 at the age of 87. At her funeral service, held in a Walnut Street undertaker's parlor, nicely-dressed men and women paid tribute in extended silence. The men sat with their felt hats on, a common practice among black church people of those days. My parents and I were honored to be in their presence and to participate in the last tributes to Ida Murray. She was a special person.

We hope to have eight steamers and our Rauch & Lang electric in the July 4th parade in Hockessin tomorrow afternoon. All cars should leave Auburn Heights not later than 2:00-2:15 P.M.; the parade starts at 3:00. Two 7-passenger cars are going in addition to our Stanley Mountain Wagon, so there should be seats for all who want to go. The flags will be flying and Butch made banners advertising our next weekend opening here, August 18-19. Following the parade, several cars will be going to Woodside Farm (Mitchells' Ice Cream) before returning to Auburn Heights, but there will be rides back to Auburn Heights immediately after the parade if some of you need to do that. There will be no work session on the holiday tomorrow. On Thursday night, July 6, the first of our Ice Cream Runs is planned, also to Woodside Farm. This is not only fun for those taking cars, but provides an excellent opportunity for new drivers to get their feet wet. The plan calls for us to leave Auburn Heights about 6:30-6:45, take a 10-mile route to the Farm, have our dessert, and be on our way back by 8:00-8:15, so we can be off the road before dark.

On Thursday, July 13, Bob Wilhelm has agreed to teach a Stanley course for those who really want to become competent operators of early steam cars. For those interested, new and old members alike, please make a note that this lecture will begin at 7:00 P.M. in the Museum, and Bill Schwoebel would like an indication of how many "students" to expect. If you are more interested in other aspects of our mechanical program, or if you are already well-qualified, please don't feel you should attend, but we will be glad to have all of you who have a sincere interest. Work sessions will take place on both Tuesday and Thursday nights next week (July 11 and 13).

Many thanks to all! Tom