

June 25, 2007

Hello, Steam Team:

June 18 was a wonderful day. In 1941 it was the day I left with my family for our 9-week tour of the west in my father's '37 Packard, still in our collection. In 2007 it was the day 250 interested people were at Auburn Heights to see 50 visiting steam cars on the grounds on the first day of the week-long Eastern Steam Car Tour. Since there is so much to say about the week just past, there will not be a trivial anecdote this week.

For many weeks, the Eastern Steam Car Tour Committee of FAHP chaired by Bob Reilly, our executive director, had worked and re-worked all the details required to operate a large and successful tour. From the comments received from our visitors at week's end, these efforts were highly successful. Together with over 60 volunteers on Monday and throughout the week, the Committee performed flawlessly, and the visiting members of the steam car community and their families left Delaware highly pleased and appreciative. Ruth and I got all the accolades at the final Blow-Down banquet, but the praise should go to Bob and our GREAT volunteers.

For a day-by-day account, about 40 trailers and their owners were on hand by Saturday night prior to the big week. John Hopkins and his parking crew did a great job in the parking lots adjoining the 3 hotels on Route 202 which were headquarters for the tour. On Sunday, about 20 cars took Rob Robison's warm-up drive to the Wilmington & Western R.R. at Greenbank, where the railroad was running its "flagship" 4-4-0 locomotive #98, built by Alco at Schenectady in February, 1909. Some rode the train to Mount Cuba and return, some even rode in the cab, and others just watched the operation and enjoyed the station area. On Monday, the tour began in earnest with a drive through the Winterthur grounds, a coffee stop while there, and a 4-hour visit to Auburn Heights, where the nearly-50 visiting steamers parked on the grounds under the trees. Their occupants enjoyed our usual entertainment with the operation of two trains on the tiny Auburn Valley R.R., rides in the Mountain Wagon and the Rauch & Lang electric, steam-made popcorn, Woodside Farm Ice Cream, and box lunches under the trees and on the front porch. Ruth and her docents provided self-guided house tours, and several of our volunteers officiated in the museum which never looked better. On Tuesday, the hottest day, most of the cars made the 75-mile round-trip to Chesapeake City, and several went the extra 26 miles to Georgetown and return where they saw a real tug boat in operation. That night about 2/3 of the group went to Longwood Gardens for the fountain display and almost made it back to the buses before the heavens opened up.

On Wednesday, the highlights were the Hagley Museum with a special drive through the grounds and a visit to Granogue, the private estate of Mr. and Mrs. Irene duPont, where all enjoyed a catered lunch under a tent on the duPonts' patio. Despite rain in early morning, the skies cleared and it became a beautiful day; the good weather stayed with us for the rest of the week. On Thursday, a 100-mile day included the Rough & Tumble Engineers Museum at Kinzers, PA, a home-style lunch at Stoltzfus' Family Dining near Intercourse, and an ice cream stop at Woodside Farm near the end of the journey. The last day, Friday, was a scenic tour of southern Chester County through Chadds Ford, Lenape, Unionville, and the "hunt country", with various options and few requirements. The Firing-Up banquet was held at the duPont Country Club and the final Blow-Down banquet at the Delaware National Country Club. By 10:00 A.M. Saturday, most were on their way home. Coming the longest distance with a steam car were Pat and Merrily Farrell from Sedro Woolley, WA, Frank and Alma Hix from Estes Park, CO, and Con Fletcher and Eva Morrison from Golden, CO. Without a car were Basil Craske and his friend Alastair Jordan, and "Wumf" Tuxworth, all from England.

It is dangerous to single out volunteers who went beyond the call of duty. The trouble-truck crew was outstanding and retrieved about 10 cars during the week. Those who planned the individual days, worked with the trailers and their owners, "operated" Auburn Heights on Monday, prepared and assembled the many "goodies" for the tour packets, and handed out the materials as the registrants arrived, all deserve an "A plus". Irene and Barbara duPont's hospitality on Wednesday was very special, and the Tour Book, prepared by Bob Reilly as only he can do it, will become a collector's item. All of you made Ruth and me very proud.

THANKS.

This week, we need to clean up and get ready for our “Steamin’ Sunday” here on July 1, and the big day for the Wilmington & Western with their special train to Hockessin on Saturday, June 30. We have promised a few cars at Hockessin in early afternoon to greet the train and possibly take a few one-way passengers back to their parked cars at Greenbank Station following the festivities. We should plan to be in Hockessin by 1:30 P.M. I plan to use the Mountain Wagon and I hope at least four or five qualified drivers will want to take that many additional cars. Then we’ll need to get them in place in the Museum for our Sunday visitors. Brent McDougall is chair person for the July 1 event, and he will be scheduling volunteers to cover the many jobs. We have received some very good publicity, so we are hoping for a good crowd. Please let Brent know if you can help next Sunday. Many thanks. Tom