

F.A.H.P. News, August 13, 2012

The Pullman Cars on the Auburn Valley: Before World War II, most crack trains carried heavy-weight Pullman cars for first-class passengers. These cars were built by the Pullman Company, not by the railroad on which they were used, and nearly all had both names and numbers. Although many were named for individuals, usually well-known male Americans, there was no coordination between the name and the number on the car, the latter used for railroad recognition in making up a train and for reservation purposes. Most of these cars had a number of “sections” (upper and lower berths), and one or two drawing rooms for more deluxe accommodations. The passenger-carrying cars on the one-eighth size Auburn Valley Railroad at Auburn Heights did not look like real passenger cars in the 1960s and 1970s, and the railroad did not operate in the 1980s. I wanted one train, at least, to look like a real passenger train of bygone days, so in the early 1990s this project began, along with the rebuilding of the railroad. Fabricated parts were purchased for three scale-model “Pullmans” from Mountain Car Company of Salem, Virginia, including the 6-wheel trucks equipped with vacuum brakes. Mike McDevitt assembled and painted these three cars a dark but brilliant red, similar to the Tuscan red used by the Pennsylvania Railroad. Since these cars were scale in every external detail, they were barely 16” wide, suitable only for young people and thin adults, so two more cars for this “set” were built by Herb Kephart with the width increased to 20” and with doors that opened on one side of each car. The five cars were lettered by Jim Sank, and in addition to “Auburn Valley”, they were named and numbered, as were their full-sized ancestors.

In earlier times, women did not get a fair shake in a male society, so I wanted to name the cars for women in our family, namely the mothers and grandmothers of my wife Ruth and me. The car numbers would correspond to the dates of their births, with the initial “one” being dropped (Car #870 for example, the “Laura R. Sharpless”, is named for Ruth’s maternal grandmother, and indicates the year of her birth, 1870). Following is a brief description of those for whom the cars are named.

Car #852, the “Mary E. Shallcross”, was named for my maternal grandmother (1852-1944) whose six children were born on Belview Farm northwest of Odessa. Widowed in 1911, she held her family together with her home in Middletown being a perennial place for happy family gatherings. I was her youngest grandchild, and we had a special relationship. Car #896, the “Emma S. Pierson”, was named for Ruth’s mother (1896-1985), who died three months after Ruth and I were married. Born on the Sharpless Farm adjoining Yorklyn Road, she spent her married life on the old Pierson farmstead on Southwood Road near Hockessin, and outlived her husband, Wilson T. Pierson, by six years.

Car #854, the “Elizabeth C. Marshall”, was named for my paternal grandmother (1854-1930), who was the hostess of Auburn Heights from 1897 until 1921. She moved into a Wilmington apartment when my parents were married, and although I remember her, I really did not know her very well. Car #885, the “Esther S. Marshall”, was named for my mother (1885-1979), who was hostess of Auburn Heights for 58 years and who made many improvements to the horticulture of the property and the furnishings of the big house. And finally, Car #870, the

“Laura R. Sharpless” mentioned above, has an observation platform and brings up the rear of the five-car train, usually pulled by Clarence Marshall’s first A.V.R.R. locomotive, #401, built in 1960. Laura Ruth Yeatman Sharpless (1870-1942) was born at the Yeatman homestead at the north end of Nine Gates Road in Kennett Township, and lived her married life on Yorklyn Road.

Work Report: On Tuesday night, the Events Committee met with 6 members present, and including these, there were 19 for the work session. Work continued on the 607 re-assembly and the rebuilding and installation of the 76’s feed water heater. The locomotives were cleaned from their August 5 “Steamin’ Day” runs. Some more organizational work was done on parts and tools in the garage and shop.

On Wednesday, the rest rooms, shop, and popcorn machine were cleaned up from the varied activity, and a load of iron was taken to the scrap yard that netted FAHP \$112. On Thursday, the 76’s heater and flue were installed in place with only minimal work remaining, and the faithful 607 group continued their progress. The Board of Directors was having its quarterly Board meeting upstairs, so that reduced the number at the work session. Cars were prepared for the Wilmington & Western R.R. event on Saturday, and two, the Models 725 and 87, piloted by Robert Hopkins and myself, made the trip to Greenbank and return in good order.

Our last Ice Cream Run of the season will be on Tuesday, August 14, when cars will leave Yorklyn at 6 P.M. At present writing, it is expected that the 3 condensing cars and the Mountain Wagon will make the trip. Next Sunday, August 19, our Annual Volunteers’ Picnic will be held on the lawn at Auburn Heights from 1:00 to 4:00 P.M. On Monday, August 20, the first section of the Auburn Heights Preserve Trail, a 1.2-mile loop around the hillside west of Auburn Heights, will be dedicated, with Governor Markell and other dignitaries expected to make the trip on our Mountain Wagon.