

The Front Porch at Auburn Heights: In the days before World War II, this is the time of year when the front porch would be readied for the summer. There were attached year-round trellises between the cornices and the porch railings, and their climbing roses were starting to bloom. (The trellises outlasted the rose bushes, and in the years after the war, I would sometimes climb them late at night and enter a second-floor window when I was locked out). In addition, canvas awnings on metal pipe framework were installed each spring for the summer season.

Rope-type floor mats, substituting for rugs, were put down, and the summer furniture, either wicker or Adirondack chairs, were placed appropriately. The front door was used frequently in those days, especially by strangers and by friends who came for a visit. Before the age of TV, and when the telephone was used mostly for emergencies, those coming for a friendly visit were usually unannounced. They would park on the driveway in front, come to the front door, and if it was on a pleasant summer evening, they would be invited to sit on the front porch. The visit probably lasted an hour and consisted mostly of conversation, with possibly light refreshments signaling the right time to leave.

With no air conditioning in the house, it was the coolest place to sit in the evening, which my father did regularly to smoke his after-dinner cigar. My mother would come and go but was always too busy to sit for long. During the August trapshooting tournament at the Yorklyn Gun Club, we always had house guests (some paid a modest lodging fee) to occupy most of the bedrooms. Dr. I. S. "Doc" Lilly of Stanton, Michigan, who would stay with us with his teenage son Ned (one of the best trapshooters in the country) would join my father on the porch, where he particularly enjoyed hearing the frogs croaking in the creek below (the pond was not built at that time). Ned would usually be "out on the town" with his younger friends, such as expert shooters Joe Hiestand and Hale Jones.

In late summer, when the temperature would dip below 70 degrees before dark, it became more comfortable inside the house. In mid-September, the process of putting everything away took place. The furniture, rope rugs, and awnings were covered and stored in the basement for the winter. Visitors still came to the front door, however, and a large thermometer attached to a window frame showed how hot a summer day or how cold a winter morning could be in Yorklyn. Eighteen degrees below zero was noted on February 9, 1934.

After World War II, probably reflecting the age of my parents as well as the changing times with air conditioning and TV, the front porch was used very seldom, and the front door gave way to the side door and the kitchen door for daily use. When my parents lived on the second floor starting in 1956, a sign near the front porch directed visitors to the side door. I still climbed the trellises until they became unsafe.

Starting in 1986, Ruth and I enjoyed the porch again, but we never seemed to have time to "sit." Wicker furniture with cushions and hanging baskets embellished the appearance. Whereas the front of the porch was used before World War II, we tended to use the portion on the side next to the sunporch and occasionally had our evening meal there. On the rounded portion close to the large scarlet oak, there was always a nice breeze. Governor Ruth Ann Minner and her entourage joined us there for a summer supper when they visited in 2006.

House tours have been given on our public days for about 10 years now, and they all begin on the porch near the front door. While the wooden floor, the railings, and the ornate cornice work are high-maintenance items, Auburn Heights would not be the same without its spacious porch.

Work Report: On Tuesday, May 31, a record 23 volunteers were on hand, as follows: Ted Kamen (in charge), Tom Marshall, Steve Bryce, Bob Jordan, Edwin Paschall, Dave Leon, Jerry Lucas, Anne Cleary, John Bacino, Brent McDougall, John Schubel, Mike Ciosek, Neal Sobocinski, Jay Williams, Mac Taylor, Mark Bodestab, Tom Sandbrook, Dennis Tile, Paul Kratunis, Bob Stransky, Matt Richard, Bob Koury, and Emil Christofano.

In an attempt to properly adjust the gear mesh in the Model H-5, it was discovered that additional spacers are needed on the frame rods to give proper clearance for the engine cover. This will require partially removing the engine from the car, which will be undertaken as soon as it is moved back to the working garage. The Lionel trains crew oiled the locomotives, cleaned the track, and made the layout ready for a busy day on June 5. All cars in the museum were inspected and cleaned, where needed.

On the Models 735 and 740, the fuel, water, and oil levels were checked. Materials in the shop and garage continued to be sorted. The boiler for Locomotive 402 was moved and temporarily hung over the center track in the engine house, and the rebuilt chassis was rolled under it for attachment on Thursday. The railroad's wooden captain's chairs were repaired where needed, and all the trucks under the red passenger cars were inspected, with no defects observed. Wiring for the dash and parking lights on the '37 Packard took place. We were glad to welcome back Emil Christofano, whom we had not seen for several weeks.

On Wednesday, June 1, seven volunteers answered the call: Richard Bernard (in charge), Larry Tennity, Jerry Novak, Mike Ciosek, Dave Leon, Gary Fitch, and Tom Marshall.

Several more ties were replaced on the A.V.R.R. The switch at the far end of the trestle was repaired. The sliding "barn doors" on the carriage house (garage) were adjusted and greased. Worn places on the leather seat cushions and backs on the Mountain Wagon were touched up with black leather dye to improve their appearance. This car is scheduled for use at the Fire Company Appreciation Day at Woodside Farm on June 4, our Birthday Bash at Auburn Heights on June 5, and at the Elegance at Hershey on June 12.

Sorting continued on the myriad of items to be stored in the shop and garage. Some new cabinetry desired has been identified, and Richard Bernard is donating two steel drawer sets, similar to one we already have in use. We are still in need of fireproof steel cabinets for the storage of flammable materials and are working on leads to acquire these.

Kelly Williams conducted another driving lesson with the Model 725 and new student Larry Tennity. The car was not fired up, but all the systems were reviewed and explained.

On Thursday, June 2, 12 volunteers attended the work session, as follows: Tim Ward (in charge), Larry Tennity, Jim Personti, Geoff Fallows, Bob Jordan, Ted Kamen, Bill Schwoebel, Bob Stransky, Dave Stransky, Steve Bryce, Jared Schoenly, and Dennis Dragon.

Engine packings were snugged up on the Model 735. On the '37 Packard, the new wiring project continued by working on the direction signals and the heater switch. The boiler for Locomotive 402 was lowered into place on the newly rebuilt chassis, and all is bolted together except the smoke box. The Mountain Wagon seats were thoroughly cleaned and coated with Lexol.

The problem with the carriage on the bench lathe was addressed. The spouts were attached to the new hexane cans, which should now be used instead of the one-gallon Coleman and paint thinner cans, which are really unsafe. The "hands on" engine-and-rear display in the museum was cleaned. The Cretors popper and the Gift Shop carts were moved to the garage in preparation for the Birthday Bash on June 5.

With our Model 735, Bob Wilhelm taught a lesson late Thursday afternoon with students John Bacino and Paul Kratunis. Early in the work session, Jared Schoenly took the car for a spin. Everything worked reasonably well, with a few leaks to be repaired before its use on June 5.