

F.A.H.P. News, May 7, 2012

Automobile Dealers in Kennett Square: Dealerships in Kennett Square changed some over the years, but I remember those of the 1930s through the 1950s. It's amazing that a borough the size of Kennett with just over 3,000 residents could support so many, but even much smaller places such as Avondale and West Grove had auto dealerships.

Dave Mason's agency at State Street and Mill Road had Chevrolet, and later Oldsmobile as well, possibly only after it was bought by Bill Luke, the Olds dealer in Wilmington. Jim Worrall and then his brother Tom had the Ford agency on South Broad Street next to the American Legion Building. Milo Jackson was their chief mechanic. Bill McCord sold Pontiacs in a small "shack of a garage" on West State Street opposite the Friends Home. When he moved to better quarters on East State Street, he eventually took on Buick in addition to Pontiac in the 1960s. Monroe L. "Monnie" Nute, a native of Adams or Franklin County, sold Chryslers and Plymouths at his garage built in the 1930s on West State Street. Almost next to him, Robert E. Ferguson sold Dodges and probably Plymouths as well.

At the conclusion of World War II, John and Joe Bacino gained a Packard franchise and built a fine new garage at Mill Road and Cypress Street. (John was F.A.H.P. member Dorothy Boxler's father). Unfortunately Packard management lost a competitive edge, and the company went out of business in 1956 (except for "Studebaker Packards" that were built in '57 and '58). Pierce's Thriftway Market later occupied the Packard building. A man named Thatcher obtained a Buick dealership in the 1950s and first operated from the old Ford garage on South Broad Street before building a fine new facility east of town on what was then U.S.Route 1. Later the Ford agency occupied this building before the Boxlers' Country Butcher Market took over at this location.

In the boom times of the 1920s, two large stone garages were built in Kennett Square, both still standing and used for other purposes. One was the Mohican Garage between West State and West Linden streets, with an entrance from each, the Linden Street side being one floor higher than the level of State Street. A few mechanics repaired and serviced cars here, and there was ample storage as well. In the late 1940s, Bill Allaband rented the upper floor for his auto body and paint shop, and the Models 607, 820 (Mountain Wagon), 725, and 735, all still in our collection, were painted here in earlier restorations. The other similar facility was the Royal Garage on South Union Street built by Jake Noznesky for his brother. When the original operation faltered, Jake took charge, and in the 1940s and early 1950s, it was run by his son Raymond. Today, the Mohican contains shops on the lower level, and the Royal Garage is used as a youth center. There were also three auto parts shops, including Kennett Auto Parts that moved twice and was owned by the Lipschutz family. Albert Lipschutz was an expert at repairing car radios. Chester County Auto Parts occupied a small building next to the Mohican garage (they may still be there), and there was one that specialized in automotive paints, first DuPont and then PPG, successor to Ditzler.

Two additional Kennett mechanics of note were Bill McSparran and Ralph “Rusty” Worth. Bill operated his business in a former livery stable with a dirt floor on North Broad Street before moving it to his home on top of Miller’s Hill. Ralph had a repair shop and Sunoco station on Route 82 about 1½ miles north of the borough and owned a Model T Ford and a Cole touring car of about 1915. Of all the businesses mentioned, to my knowledge the only three locations still involved with modern automobiles are the former Nute and Mason dealerships on West State Street and Worth’s old Sunoco station on Route 82.

Work Report: Fourteen volunteers answered the call on Tuesday night and 17 on Thursday. On Tuesday, although it sounds more-than-repetitious, positive work continued on assembling parts and placing them in their proper locations on the Stanley Model 607. The hand brake and its ratchet were properly installed. Slow but very positive progress is being made toward the re-assembly of this car. The new trap door and cover for the 725’s water tank was completed, as well as the final hook-ups and bracketing for the new 61-gallon water tank for the Model 87, successfully soldered together from two smaller tanks that had been in the car for many years (neither original). Another coat of red paint was applied to the “O”-gauge circular railway, and the Standard-gauge electric train layout is really taking on a much improved look. The Rauch & Lang batteries, new in the spring of 2007, are taking a satisfactory charge, and we hope to get one more year from them before having to replace these 15 six-volt “golf cart type” batteries. It’s possible a better charging unit may help in the recharge process. An overgrown woodpile behind the museum was cleaned up, and the rotten wood disposed of.

On Thursday, the Model 87 was road-tested on a round-trip to Hockessin, when we learned our source for kerosene had dried up, and it was necessary to fill the tank with a combination of unleaded gasoline and diesel fuel. One of the calipers on the front wheel disc brakes on this car was adjusted, and the hanger strap and its studs were examined for looseness. A first coat of green paint was applied to the new leg and braces on the railroad’s water tower. The Model 735 was road tested, new balls were installed in the water pumps, and the pilot was made stronger by filing the pin. Work continued on the Model 607, including the straightening of the cylinder oil tank (which was badly dented), the Rauch & Lang was road-tested again, and three cars were cleaned and further readied for their use on May 5.

On Friday, the Models 87 and 735 were loaded on our trailers for their trips to Dover to give rides and help celebrate Old Dover Days. The 71 was prepped for its 10-mile round-trip to Winterthur for that museum’s invitational event on Saturday. Our volunteers Steve Bryce, Jerry Novak, Dave Leon, Dan Citron, Tim Ward and Tim Nolan took charge of the Dover event, and Tom drove the 71 to and from Winterthur. No problems were encountered, and 530 riders were counted in the two cars at Dover.

On Tuesday, the following participated in the work session: Steve Bryce (in charge), Dennis Dragon, Ted Kamen, Bob Jordan, Dave Leon, Jeff Pollock, Emil Christofano, Jerry Novak, Mark Hopkins, Mac Taylor, Richard Bernard, Mark Russell, Tim Nolan, and Tom Marshall. On Thursday, those working were Tom Marshall (in charge), Lou Mandich, Steve Bryce, Dave Leon, Eugene Maute, Gerhard Maute, Jim Personti, Geoff Fallows, Richard Bernard, Bob Jordan, Ted Kamen, Tim Ward, Chuck Erikson, Emil Christofano, Jerry Novak, Tim Nolan, and Dan Citron.