

**The Willises of Penns Grove and John Philip Sousa:** Ralph P. Willis (1882–1981) of Penns Grove, New Jersey, was a prominent trapshooter for much of his life and sold ammunition at Yorklyn during the big tournament. He and his brother, Robinson F. Willis, owned and operated R. F. Willis and Brother, a sporting goods and hardware outlet in Penns Grove. Ralph went to the Grand American tournament in Vandalia, Ohio, with my father and me in 1940 and 1942 and with my father in 1947. He also accompanied us on the Glidden Tour through New England in 1947, riding most of the time in our 1918 Stanley Model 735.

The famous march king and composer, John Philip Sousa (1855–1932), who wrote *The Stars and Stripes Forever* and countless other marches, was also a prominent trapshooter. When his band was not performing, he attended “shoots” all over the country. A registered shoot was held outside Penns Grove about 1920, and Sousa was there. Ralph Willis and his wife, the former Florence Brinton of West Chester, Pennsylvania, invited Mr. Sousa to come home with them for lunch, and the band leader accepted. He “hit it off” with them and was especially fond of Mrs. Willis. For several years thereafter, he sent little mementos of thanks for his visit and pleasant lunch at their home. She treasured these and had them displayed in her dining room at their riverfront home in Penns Grove. My parents and I enjoyed several dinners with the Willises, and they always lodged in the north bedroom at Auburn Heights during the Yorklyn tournament.

Ralph Willis was born and raised on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. He was one of five or six children. When he was about 10 years old, he and several of his siblings were standing on a porch in front of their house when a bolt of lightning struck. It killed his sister, and he had a lifelong mark down the side of his body where he was struck (though it did not shorten his life, which lasted for 99 years).

John Philip Sousa never retired. He never shot at Yorklyn, but he did shoot at the old Greenhill Gun Club in Wilmington, before Wawaset Park was built in the mid-1920s where the old gun club had been located. In 1932, at the age of 77, he and his band were playing in Reading, Pennsylvania. He died in his sleep at the Abraham Lincoln Hotel in Reading of an apparent heart attack.

I visited Ralph Willis for the last time in 1981, a few months before he passed away. He told me he had been recognized as the oldest man in Salem County. I took with me some old 16 mm. movies of him shooting at Yorklyn in 1940. He seemed interested, but then his mind would wander, and he couldn’t pay attention to what was being projected.

Bruce Willis, the well-known actor from Penns Grove, has to be descended from Ralph or his brother, but I never researched this. Ralph and Florence had three sons, Calmer, Donald, and Warren, and his brother had at least one, Robinson Jr. All of them were married and had families.

The annual Volunteer Picnic drew more than 40 of FAHP's dedicated corps to enjoy delicious barbecue (courtesy of Rose Ann Hoover), sample an amazing array of pot luck specialties, show off their own classic automobiles, and do battle for auction goodies donated by volunteers (raising \$321 for FAHP). Thanks to all those who joined us -- and to those who could not make it -- for your continued support.

August and September are busy months, with many weekend events at which our cars will be featured. If you would like to drive (or ride in) an Auburn Heights car to any of the following events, please contact Steve Bryce ([sbryce@auburnheight.org](mailto:sbryce@auburnheight.org)) to stake your claim on a car (or a passenger seat -- space is limited). Susan will be submitting all Hagley registrations to ensure that the Auburn Heights vehicles are listed and grouped together so please forward info to her ([srandolph@auburnheights.org](mailto:srandolph@auburnheights.org)) after you've confirmed your car with Steve. Upcoming Events:

- Wilmington & Western SummerFest, Sat. Aug 21 (1 or 2 Stanleys)
- Chadds Ford Days, Sat & Sun, Sept. 11 & 12 (2 Stanleys & 1 Packard needed each day)
- Mushroom Festival, Sat & Sun, Sept. 11 & 12 (2 Stanleys needed each day)
- Hagley Car Show, Sun Sept. 19
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The Publicity Team is seeking help in distributing rack cards and fliers to locations in nearby Pennsylvania communities. No experience required! Following is a partial list of target areas -- if you are familiar with any and willing to pitch in, please contact Jonathan Rickerman ([jrickerman@att.net](mailto:jrickerman@att.net)):

- Avondale, West Grove & Jennersville
- West Chester
- Oxford
- Media

#### Tour Guides Needed

Want to learn more about the mansion and museum? We are seeking additional people who enjoy learning and sharing. No previous guiding or public speaking experience required -- we'll teach you all the tricks to being a great tour guide. If you'd like to join the Auburn Heights Docent Team, contact Dan Citron ([Daniel.Citron@state.de.us](mailto:Daniel.Citron@state.de.us)).