

SEPTEMBER 1, 2008 (LABOR DAY) F.A.H.P. NEWS

James H. Wagenhorst (c. 1869–c. 1957): “Wag”, as he was affectionately called by all who knew him, was born near the headwaters of the Lehigh River at Gouldsboro, PA. He went to the University of Pennsylvania and played on its football team in the early 1890’s. Graduating as an engineer, he loved to tinker, and had all kinds of inventions to his credit, many of them quite humorous. When the new-born auto industry settled in Detroit, he moved there and met most of the early automotive giants, and worked for many of them. He considered Walter P. Chrysler a close friend.

About 1920, “Wag” married my mother’s second cousin, Ada Tygert. Ada and my mother had played together as children, and they were very close in age. Wag was about 50 and Ada in her mid 30’s when they were married. They never had children, but enjoyed life together until Wag’s death nearly 40 years later. Wag was the chief designer for the Kelsey Wheel Corporation in Detroit, and he held patents on numerous types of early automobile rims. Kelsey supplied many auto manufacturers with their wheels and rims, and Wag had a part in designing them. He and Ada lived in a lavish apartment overlooking the Detroit River, where Gar Wood and others raced their high-powered speed boats in the 1930’s.

Returning from the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago in early September, 1934, my parents and I stopped in Detroit, where we visited “Wag” and Ada and they entertained us royally. A few years later when drop-center rims became the norm except on trucks, the need for Wag’s inventions was greatly diminished on the many types of rims that were becoming obsolete. In his late 60’s, he retired from automotive work and he and Ada moved to Washington, DC, where they had another fine apartment just off Connecticut Avenue.

After World War II, my mother invited the Wagenhorsts to spend Christmas at Auburn Heights on at least two occasions. They would usually spend about 3 days (or as long as my father could stand Wag’s stories). I think they still owned a car, but they would come by train, usually First Class on the B & O. I remember meeting them about 1947 as they arrived at the Delaware Avenue Station in Wilmington on the “Capitol Limited”. Both were dressed to the hilt; they were attired as if to attend a formal ball of the period. After all, Christmas was coming.

The last time I saw Wag was in 1952 when the Glidden Tour ended in Washington to help the AAA celebrate its 50th anniversary. He was in his glory talking to pioneers like Colonel Augustus Post about the early days of motoring. I recall one afternoon the two of them sitting in the back seat of our Model 87 parked at the Shoreham Hotel and talking “old times”. It’s impossible to find characters like Post and “Wag” in the 21st century.

The preparation, promotion, and hard work for our last SUMMER public event of 2008 on August 31 was well worth it, as our largest attendance since FAHP began was recorded on a beautiful day. It would be nice to tell you we had 650 visitors, but the paid attendance was only 649. This compares to 501 on the last Sunday in August last year, also a very good day. Congratulations and sincere THANKS to all who played a part on the day itself or beforehand. Our mechanical things went like clock-work: the two Auburn Valley trains never stopped from about 12:45 to 5:00, and four cars gave rides continuously. In addition to the faithful Mountain Wagon and the Rauch & Lang with its successful reserve electric motor, the 100th birthday cars, the Models K and H-5, ran flawlessly all afternoon. The steam popcorn machine never faltered, and the electric trains were run by expert hands. The parking crew had cars parked to the top of the hill, but no one complained. Lou Mandich brought down Jake Noznesky's Model T Ford truck for display, Ed Lee rode his high-wheel bicycle around for the enjoyment of the crowd, and Paul and Joyce Harris entertained all afternoon with their hurdy-gurdy. I will not mention other names, as it was a complete group effort with over 50 people, including several Americorps volunteers, comprising our work force. ALL OF YOU ARE GREAT!

Mark Russell and Steve Bryce have the burner ready for installation on the Model 76, and Steve and Ann went to the Creamery at Woodside Farm with the 735 on Saturday to promote "our day" at the annual Craft Fair there. Also on Saturday, Anne Cleary and Steve Jensen conducted a training session for engineers and train crew on the Auburn Valley. About 5 "students" took part. Mary Hopkins met with Catherine, Steve Bryce and Rob Robison last Tuesday to discuss planned giving through the Delaware Community Foundation. Dan Citron spent some time with me in advising how to save and catalog pictures and printed material for future use. Catherine has made progress toward hiring a part-time office assistant with strengths in using the computer software we have in place.

Next Saturday and Sunday, September 6 and 7, "Chadds Ford Days" will be attended by several of our volunteers and at least three cars each day. We have not attended this annual event before but we believe it will provide excellent exposure for FAHP and our public programs. On Tuesday, Sept. 9, the Events Committee will meet in the FAHP office at 7:00 P.M. On Saturday, Sept. 13, the Lions' Eye Bank charter event takes place at Auburn Heights, and although the advance reservations are disappointing, we will need 15 or 20 volunteers to "run the show" on this day. The next day, Sunday, Sept. 14, is the annual Hagley Museum's Car Show, and so far about 5 cars from here are entered. It's not too late, but if you want to take a car, the reservation must go in almost immediately. Entry blanks are here on the bench in the garage.

Tom