

MARCH 8, 2010 F.A.H.P. NEWS

A Week in June, 1943: I started in an Army program called “Pre-Meteorology” at Brown University in Providence in mid-March, 1943. Half way through this six-month program, they gave us a recess from studies to learn how the Army did things. We marched all over the place including a 12-mile bivouac almost to Woonsocket and back on a very hot day, experienced several kinds of poison gas in a tent where we took off our gas masks just before exiting the tent to see what it was like, and had a special drill on Brown’s campus for the Governor of Rhode Island.

Then came three days that were fun for me. The time was about June 20, the weather perfect, and we were taken by bus to Sachuest Point each day for practice at the Navy’s Rifle Range at that location along the ocean east of Newport. Many in our class dreaded the experience of learning to shoot a gun, and its accompanying recoil, but I relished it, as I had been trapshooting for many years with my father and had shot a 22-caliber rifle before that. The trip itself from and to Providence each day was beautiful along the east side of Narragansett Bay and over the Mount Hope Bridge.

At the Rifle Range, we were divided, more or less, into three groups, and we alternated activities. One group lay prone with a 30-30 rifle, shooting at a still target while being instructed by naval officers and enlisted men. A second group was behind and below the large targets, pulling them down, marking the holes, and recording the scores before returning the targets to be shot at again. Finally, a third group was free to relax which usually meant swimming in the surf nearby. The water off Rhode Island is COLD in June, but young men not yet 20 years old didn’t seem to mind. I enjoyed all three occupations.

I found another connection at Sachuest Point. Joe Hiestand, perhaps the greatest trapshooter of those years and an annual visitor to Yorklyn, had told me of his association with George “Twinkle-Toes” Selkirk, when they were together in Florida the year before. Hiestand, then a lieutenant in the air corps, was a shooting instructor, as was Selkirk, a navy ensign or lieutenant, at an installation nearby. Selkirk had been an outfielder for the New York Yankees in the years leading up to the war, and he was the head instructor at Sachuest Point. I told him I knew Joe Hiestand, and this lowly buck private had it made! At the end of the intensive week, we were granted a 3-day pass, and I enjoyed my mother’s cooking and my father’s mechanical projects at Auburn Heights.

I never saw George Selkirk again, and he did not play in the major leagues after World War II. However, Bill Schwoebel’s father had a book “The Philadelphia Inquirer Remembers” that showed the box score of Lou Gehrig’s last game in 1939. Sure enough, Selkirk was playing left field! Joe Hiestand, whom I saw last in 1984, died in 2005 at the age of 99.

Susan Randolph has completed her first full week as Executive Director, and we are pleased she is taking hold, despite computer problems that persist. A temporary hook-up allows the office to function much as it should, and our new or rebuilt computer (only 4 months old) is due back any day. Our slightly-late "Auburn Heights Herald" is off the press, and should be in the mail to all members early this week.

The new Website Committee headed by Anne Cleary met last week and is progressing toward an updated site. All are very grateful to John McNamara, who set up our Website several years ago, and has singly managed it since. The Museum Committee with Dan Citron as chair is finalizing plans for 2010 exhibits, albeit some of them temporary. The Education Committee, chaired jointly by Pete Parlett and Richard Bernard, had a good meeting on Thursday night, and we can expect many improvements in our educational program in the months to come. Tomorrow, March 9, at 7 P.M. the Events and Scheduling Committee, Anne Cleary, chairperson, will meet in the FAHP office. Dan Citron is planning to meet with "Mansion Docents" on Saturday, March 13, at 1:00 P.M. in the big house, and the Executive Committee of the Board is scheduled for Thursday, March 11, at 5:30 in the F.A.H.P. office.

Last week the work sessions were productive. Our new member Tim Ward has tirelessly cleaned the underside of our Stanley Model 735. Jerry Lucas, with help from Tim and others, has the engine out of the Model H-5, and we are still looking for the solution to the cylinder-block problem. New blocks are available in England, and there are other possibilities, which we are exploring. Emil Christofano, Jim Personti, and Jerry Novak worked on getting the spare electric motor for the Rauch & Lang apart, and Emil has had an outside machinist look at it with the hope that he may donate some of his time to make rear-gear repairs to this car. Bill Schwoebel, Steve Bryce, and Jim Personti re-worked the throttle alignment on the Model K, and put up the burner. Everything is now hooked up for testing under steam. Jim Sank, who owns the large diesel locomotive in the basement of the shop, has swapped this engine for a smaller one of the proper scale to run on the Auburn Valley. This exchange is supposed to occur next weekend if we can get a big pile of snow out of the way, and Jim is happy to let us use his new engine if it will be beneficial to the Auburn Valley R.R. Butch Cannard is working with Susan to get our computer up and running again and to catch up on printing.

Steve Bryce, Bill Schwoebel, and I are working on a plan and a schedule to move the Model 607 project along in the next few months. If we can have our prep work done by mid-summer, a professional paint shop will take the parts from there. Our plan calls for a number of our active volunteers to assume responsibility for overseeing various phases of this work.

Historic Red Clay Valley, Inc., operating as the Wilmington & Western R.R., is having its 50th Annual Dinner Meeting at the Delaware National Country Club (formerly Hercules C.C.) on Saturday night, March 20, social hour at 5 P.M., dinner at 6 P.M. A program featuring a train trip on the branch of the B & O from Wilmington to Landenberg about 1900 is featured. A great dinner is promised for \$41 per adult. For reservations, call Carole Wells at 998-1930.

Tom

