

October 29, 2007

Hello, Steam Team:

Our American Language: Our everyday language changes with time, and I would guess all languages are the same. How many young people know what “Fill the bill” means? Things that are very nice (in the beholder’s opinion) have been ”peachy”, “swell”, “neat”, and now “cool” or “awesome”. I still use “neat” but this is no better description of something very nice than is “cool”. I first heard kids use “cool” in the early 1970’s when describing our Mountain Wagon. I told them no, it was hot, not cool. Cool went into submission for a good many years but when it resurfaced, it was here in a big way.

On our 1908 Stanley Model K’s water tank is written large with permanent crayon “OK”. First I thought this had been rebuilt and tested in the 1970’s, and then I realized it had probably been there since the car was first built. “OK” dates back to 1836! Martin VanBuren, nicknamed “Old Kinderhook” from his home town in the Hudson Valley, used the abbreviation in his successful campaign for the presidency. Like “cool” it may have been in remission for many years, and I doubt that it was in Abe Lincoln’s vocabulary. But when it came back it endured for 100 years so far, and younger people than I use it at the end of a sentence when explaining something, followed by a question mark.

We have really never liked to call people men and women. Men are often fellows (or fellas), and became guys long before women did. Now everybody is a guy. Women were girls or gals, or less flattering names. A lot of new expressions have arrived in our language which I never heard of until the past 25 years or so. You could grow vegetables or flowers, but you could not grow a system or a business until 25 years ago. You could make it grow or cause it to grow, but you couldn’t grow it. Terms like “the bottom line” and “at this point in time” have crept into people’s conversations, especially when eyebrows are raised to stress an important point. Until a couple of years ago, I didn’t know what “24-7” meant.

My grandmother Shallcross and her three daughters would not say “hello”, because it had “hell” in it. They greeted friends with “hey-o”. She called an automobile, new to her at age 60, a “machine”, as did many her age. Going ‘way back to the mid-nineteenth century, passenger trains were called “steam cars”. They mean something else to us now. When I was young, if one of my friends had been named Jason or Joshua, they would have been the laughing stock of their class. Now George, Henry, Albert, and Thomas are in that category. Almost all Cheryls were born in the 1950’s. Oh well, more serious stuff will come along next week. By that time, something new may have crept into our American language.

This past weekend was a good one for FAHP. Our public days tallied 257 visitors on Saturday and 502 on Sunday with over 300 touring the house during the two days. Drenching rain continued until 11:15 Saturday morning, the wind shifted, the rain stopped completely, and there were patches of sunshine in the afternoon. Sunday was a bright, crisp fall day with a cool breeze. Including the guides in the house, 56 volunteers worked on Saturday and 48 on Sunday. The house, grounds and museum looked beautiful, thanks to the combined tireless efforts of many volunteers. The Halloween theme from ghosts in the museum around the cars (one was driving the '37 Packard) to chrysanthemums, pumpkins, corn stalks, and bales of straw around the grounds, has never been done as well at Auburn Heights. It's not possible to mention all who were responsible, but Rose Ann Hoover, Rob and Chevonne Robison, Richardson's Floral Center, and Charmayne Pierson Busker (who brought the pumpkins from her home 70 miles away) deserve special mention. I would also like to mention the excellent work of our young volunteer/members: Steven Jensen, Luke McNamara, Robert Hopkins, and Ted Simpkins, along with Ted's friend, Miranda Steen. What a great group of volunteers we have! THANK YOU.

The work sessions this week will be "cleaning up", mostly the locomotives and the shop. It's time to wash the boilers of 401 and 402, although the final wash and winterizing will be done after our November events. The tops can be put up on our touring cars and the '13 roadster (although there is a chance for an afternoon tour on Sunday, November 4, for those interested on short notice), and gasoline can be drained from the H-5 and the K. The pilot casting is here for the new burner for the Model CX, and Jim, Jeff, and helpers can finish up the burner work. Further inspection of the Stanley Museum's Model 70 should be done this week, so we can make a report of our findings to the Museum's trustees. Butch Cannard, Jim Personti, Kelly Williams, Lou Mandich, Jerry Lucas, Steve Bryce, and Bill Rule have already developed some preliminary recommendations. A few minor track projects need attention when the weather is favorable. On Thursday evening, November 1, Anne Cleary has called the monthly Events Committee meeting, to be held at 7:30 P.M., probably in the museum.

As the Search Committee develops candidates to fill Bob Reilly's job, we realize what a fantastic job Bob has done overall. In the wide scope of his work, he will be impossible to replace, but we hope to find a museum professional we can afford to tackle the important things ahead of us. We must develop a Strategic Plan, and from that move to the capital improvements we find most necessary. The response to writing grant applications will not be successful without such plans in place. The Search Committee has had resumes from 7 people, and plans its next meeting for Thursday, November 8. Mike May has talked with 3 of the candidates so far, and the process is continuing. Bob would like to wind up his work here in January, but is willing to help us part-time, and mostly from his Colorado home, for a few months thereafter if necessary.

The request letters for our Annual Appeal are in the mail, and we hope you will want to be as generous as you can. Thanks to all of you for your support in all areas. Tom