

Refrigeration at Auburn Heights: (Portions of this subject have been mentioned in the “News” of 6/1/05, 9/12/05, and 2/5/07). I’m sure a large ice box was among the furnishings of Auburn Heights when it opened for occupancy in 1897. This may have been the first refrigerator I remember, or it may have been an earlier one. It must have been located either in the original kitchen itself or in the room immediately below, usually called the “laundry.” If it was below, we know there was an active “dumb waiter” in a small pantry just off the kitchen (and laundry), the platform of which was activated by a heavy rope and a pulley system that worked like a block-and-fall. Foodstuffs were stored in the basement, especially in the summer, where it was considerably cooler.

Wherever that first ice box was, large cakes of ice, possibly 50 pounds each, had to be added daily. The first such unit I remember had six wooden paneled doors and was varnished but not painted. The top two doors were the smallest with a beveled mirror in each. These opened to the ice compartment. The larger four doors below were in two rows and opened to take food in and out. At least one shelf separated the bottom from the top. About the time my parents were married and my grandmother moved out in 1921, a small room was added just off a pantry of about the same size in the area between the original kitchen and the dining room. Two small rear dining room windows were closed off because of this addition. In this room is where I first remember a refrigerator, but I think ice still had to be used to cool it. Shortly thereafter the dumb waiter area was converted into a dish closet on each floor, although the old rope and pulleys were intact until 1996 when some new electrical wiring utilized this channel.

The first improvement, still in the 1920s, was to install cooling coils in the old ice box, with an electric compressor in the basement below, using sulfur dioxide as the coolant. This worked well, and a gas leak could be detected easily by an odor of rotten eggs. Ice trays and with cooling coils occupied the original ice compartment. The old converted ice box remained in daily use in this small room until 1934, when the new kitchen addition was opened.

The 1934 kitchen allowed for a large, modern refrigerator in the kitchen itself, and the old converted ice box was removed to the kitchen porch at the Yorklyn Gun Club, where it served well until 1950 when the last “shoots” were held there. The new refrigerator, also using sulfur dioxide with its compressor under the back porch, had 4 doors with ice trays inside one of the top doors. It was painted with a modern white enamel. The old refrigerator room became a “flower room” in 1934.

Clarence Birdseye, who had experimented with freezing fish, was credited with “inventing” frozen foods about 1928. In the mid-1930s, the first of these became available to housewives in the form of frozen peas and other green vegetables. They were immediately popular, as the taste was so much more like fresh vegetables in season than was the case with canned vegetables, a major industry in downstate Delaware. Unfortunately, however, freezers were not readily available in small sizes, and frozen lockers were rented out like safe deposit boxes in commercial places. The closest place of this kind was in Avondale. By the late 1930s, however, this inconvenience had been remedied at Auburn Heights. A separate freezer was installed in the laundry, and a much smaller “quick freezer” was in the small closet off that room. In addition to buying Birdseye frozen peas, my mother began to freeze her own fresh vegetables, especially pole lima beans. The main freezer was kept at about 20 degrees Fahrenheit, but the quick freezer was at 5 degrees below zero. It was said that to maximize the flavor, vegetables (and later beef and poultry) must be frozen FAST. So, the item went in the quick freezer for 12 hours or so before being transferred to the large freezer. This system seemed to continue for about 25 years.

In the latter years of using the 1934 kitchen, a smaller, self-contained single-door refrigerator replaced the four-door one, and when the second floor kitchen was built in 1956, another new

refrigerator was purchased. A small used refrigerator had occupied a temporary 3rd-floor kitchen during and just after World War II, and the same was true for a makeshift kitchen for the apartment over the garage. When the apartment-over-garage (now the FAHP office) was rebuilt in 1981, when the main (1934) kitchen at Auburn Heights was remodeled in 1987, and when a new 3rd-floor kitchen replaced a bathroom in 1988, all had modern refrigerators, easily available. A freezer was retained in the laundry room, and a used refrigerator has occupied a spot on the floor of the garage for many years.

Work Report: On Tuesday, May 20, 10 volunteers were on hand as follows: Dave Leon (in charge), Jerry Lucas, Richard Bernard, Ted Kamen, Steve Bryce, Tom Marshall, Jeff Kennard, Rose Ann Hoover, Dennis Dragon (in the afternoon), and Ed Paschall. The Models 820 (Mtn. Wagon) and 735 were sponged off, and more towels were cut up for shop rags. The speedometer gear, worn out beyond repair, was removed from the Model 607 for replacement.

The fuel pump was rebuilt and installed again on the Model K, and the hand pump works much more efficiently. The Model 740's burner backfired, but the problem was detected, and a repair will be made. The 3-tube water-level indicator on the Model 76, that sprung a leak on May 17 in New Castle, was replaced. It is unlikely that a good repair can be made on the old one.

On Thursday, May 22, 15 volunteers were in attendance plus two more who worked at off-times: Jerry Koss, Jared Schoenly (a new volunteer from Spring City who owns a Model 740), Dave Lumley, Eugene Maute, Gerhard Maute, Richard Bernard, Dave Leon, Ted Kamen, Steve Bryce, Jim Personti, Geoff Fallows, Bill Schwoebel, Brent McDougall, Bob Jordan, Jerry Novak (at odd times), Tim Nolan (also at odd times), and Tom Marshall (in charge). As always, we were glad to see Dave Lumley, our long-distance volunteer from Georgia.

New batteries were installed in the Rauch & Lang electric, replacing the old ones now seven years old. Piping to the new water-level indicator was completed on the Model 76, and the car was fired up and prepared for the Memorial Day parade in Kennett Square. The 735 was fired up and connections tightened, following the rupture of the tubing near the feed water heater. The car seems to be working well, but the calibration of the steam gauge needs to be checked. On the Model 740, the packing of insulation behind the branch forks and replacement of a bracket to hold these forks was completed. The car was fired up and performed well, and is ready for the Kennett parade on May 26.

The water pumps were checked out on the Model K, and the balls in the front pump were gummy and stuck to their seats. These were thoroughly cleaned, the lift checked on both pumps, and an overdose of washing soda was added to the water tank. The boiler down-pipes were rodded out on 3 or 4 cars, and a slight build-up was detected on at least two of them. We intend to follow this procedure on all our cars very soon.

A second coat of paint was applied to the garage floor in the "new" area, and this floor painting will be slightly expanded to complete the job. Caulking was done between the floor and a wooden partition. Two small window frames and their sash still need painting, fluorescent light fixtures need to be hung, and then the area will be ready to accept the storage bins to be removed from the old snack bar. A study was made of how the parts now in these bins can be stored and sorted during the moving operation. A long shelf was cleared and boxes placed there to accept the many items as they are sorted and taken from the bins. The overall move will probably take several weeks.

A new chassis, very similar to the original, was ordered for our Cretors popper, to replace the two-wheeled trailer that has supported the unit for 65 years.