

FAHP News, June 12, 2017

A Trip to Erie, 1971: Pennsylvania's only city on the Great Lakes is not a great tourist destination, but it is an interesting place. Just off shore, Oliver H. Perry defeated the British Navy in the War of 1812, sending back the message "We have met the Enemy, and He is Ours." Clayton George, one of the drivers for the Packard Motor Company of Wilmington, took my mother and her niece, Elizabeth Shallcross Roberts, to Erie about 1930, where they boarded one of the Great Lakes steamers for a cruise to Duluth and return. Both the Detroit & Cleveland Navigation Company and the Georgian Bay Line had cruise ships that called at Erie.

In 1971, the air reservoirs on Wilmington & Western (W&W) Locomotive 92 were becoming unsafe, and used reservoirs of the right size and dimensions were located at the General Electric locomotive plant in Erie. G. E. had been quite successful with Diesel locomotives in the 1940s and '50s, but by the late 1960s, General Motors Diesels had most of the market, and G.E.'s plant at Erie had fallen on hard times (in more recent years, it became busy again). I decided I could use my 1969 Chevy Longhorn pick-up truck to take delivery of the air reservoirs and bring them back from Erie to the W&W engine house at Marshallton, Delaware. In June, I drove to Meadville (PA) the first day and planned to be at the G.E. yard the next morning.

Walter Anderson and I had become friendly with the Chaffee brothers, who operated three Holiday Inns from their headquarters in Erie. After looking over the city attractions and their beautiful Holiday Inn there, Earl Chaffee drove me out on Presque Isle, a thin peninsula in the lake, busy with beach people on a bright June day (Earl Chaffee is still alive at age 103!). Then I drove over to the G.E. railroad yard, where there was a myriad of empty tracks, and the two reservoirs were loaded onto my pick-up. Since the diameter of the tanks was too great for both to fit down in the bed of the truck, the higher one was wedged between the other reservoir and one side of the straight-side body. The truck, being heavier on one side, had quite a list for the trip home, but I had no trouble.

The Chaffees had opened a new Holiday Inn at Oil City, probably 50 miles south, and they suggested I spend the night there. En-route, I stopped at the Drake Well, where oil was discovered in 1859 near Titusville. I enjoyed the stop, but the summer insects were terrible. The Oil City Holiday Inn was situated on a beautiful point of land where Oil Creek flows into the Allegheny River. Word had been sent ahead that my dinner, lodging, and breakfast would be complimentary. I had a nice dinner with the innkeeper. Millard Newman used this inn on the 1979 "Trans-Con" tour from Key West to Halifax, and I broke the axle on the Model 87 only about five miles away the morning after staying there.

Oil City, like Erie, fell on hard times in the 1970s, and '80s, when Quaker State moved its corporate offices to Texas, and synthetic oils began to take over from the favored "Pennsylvania Crude." My trip home in the Chevy Longhorn pick-up in 1971 was uneventful as I followed U.S. 322 through State College. The air reservoirs were used on locomotive 92 until it was retired from service on the W&W in the fall of 1972.

Work Report: On Tuesday, June 6, 10 volunteers were on hand, viz: Ted Kamen (in charge), Steve Bryce, Mark Bodenstab, John Bacino, Dennis Dragon, Bob Jordan, Dave Leon, Brent McDougall, Bill Scheper, and Larry Tennity.

Locomotive 402 was thoroughly cleaned from its use on June 4. The spackling project on the shop ceiling was continued. The remaining new wheels for the Model 607 were sanded for final painting.

The new running board mats for the '37 Packard Twelve were received and checked for correct dimensions. The Lionel train layout was cleaned after its heavy use on June 4. The Model 87 was made ready for its trip to New Castle and its use there on Separation Day June 10. The lift of the balls in the water pumps has been checked and refined again, and the feed water heater is by-passed.

On Wednesday, June 7, seven volunteers answered the call: Larry Tennity (in charge), Steve Bryce, Tom Marshall, Jerry Novak, Jerry Lucas, Dave Leon, and Gary Fitch.

The several display boards prepared by Susan for Yorklyn Day were brought back from the Snuff Mill Clubhouse and stored on the second floor of the museum. Water pump problems on the Model 87 were studied further, and it was noted that the pumps work well when the feed water heater is by-passed but not when it is connected. The two 12-cylinder Packards, our '32 and our '37, were switched so work can continue on the running boards of the later car. The new covers for these boards fit well, and, with necessary trimming, are ready for installation.

Two more new wheels for the 607 were sanded further in final preparation for painting. The plastic balls in the Model 71's water pumps were replaced with new ones, and the fuel filter on this car was removed and thoroughly cleaned.

On Thursday, June 8, 12 volunteers were at the work session: Jerry Novak (in charge), Tom Marshall, Steve Bryce, Jim Personti, Geoff Fallows, Bob Koury, Dennis Tiley, Bob Jordan, Ted Kamen, Dan Citron, Bob Stransky, and Kelly Williams.

The Model 87 was driven several miles earlier in the day and seemed to work very well with the feed water heater by-passed. It was then cleaned and polished for its trip to New Castle late Friday. The patch over the perch pole was painted. Final sanding of the spokes on the Model 607's new wheels was completed.

On Locomotive 402, the front truck was found to be out of position again, which took much of the weight off the drivers. The truck was taken to Jim Personti's shop for replacement of the bad wheel that has a broken flange. This locomotive will be needed again on July 2.

Serious track work was done again on the back curve of the Auburn Valley Railroad. The gauge and elevation were checked, and heavy tamping was done under the new ties. Kinks at the joints, which get worse in hot weather, were addressed. The curve needs to be checked again just before the July 2 runs. Installation of the new running board mats for the '37 Packard began.